

REFLECTIONS ON ECOLOGICAL  
PHILOSOPHY  
in Light of Dehellenized Western Theism

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Also cf. [academia.edu](http://academia.edu).

## TO THE HESITANT PHILOSOPHER \*

If philosophy's myths to philosophy's truth,  
Pros and cons with right and wrong,  
Traditionalism, existentialism and hidden wonder,  
If wisdom, Gnosticism and things unknown;  
In all their human thought retold,  
But not exactly in the ancient way,  
Can please, as in my day,  
The wiser youngsters of to-day:  
    So be it, and read on!

If not; If studious youth no longer craves,  
That ancient light recast,  
Plato, Aristotle and Thomas of Aquino,  
Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger.  
    So be it. And may we,  
In all our ignorance share the grave,  
Where these and all their musings lie!

(\* With a tip o' the hat to Robert Louis Stevenson)



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## PART I

### INTRODUCTORY PREAMBLE

#### 1. A POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR POSTHUMAN PHILOSOPHY

Can phenomenology present a reliable point of departure in light of posthuman philosophy, I asked myself? I had been taught, throughout my academic formation, that classical metaphysics is a necessary constituent of Western philosophy. (However, since the modern era science has been accepted as the better approach according to some thinkers, which caused me to wonder if science was but a different type of philosophy and not the physical discipline many understood it to be.) I concluded that science was not a philosophy. It appears to me that classical metaphysical philosophers seeking to preserve a philosophy are futile in the contemporary world which is in the process of leaving its Hellenistic epistemological foundations for technological and digital foundations of knowledge. In short, philosophical knowledge is entering a “posthuman” stage of evolutionary development shedding its Hellenistic roots. These efforts within a metaphysical Western philosophy at preserving knowledge, although rooted in experience, rely on an outdated philosophy of Platonic idealism, that tell us nothing of what our future world could be like but only what it was like. The task of phenomenological philosophers is to return to the interpretation of experience itself and seek to recast meaning not in terms of theoretical idealism, but in terms of existential meaning.

Posthuman philosophy is “post” human in the sense that it transcends the meaning of renaissance humanism or modern secular humanism. Instead of accepting an inherited

epistemology from classical Western philosophy, which assigned meaning to human activity, phenomenological philosophers assign meaning to an existential situation in which the human being finds itself. The existential situation, not its meaning, is what is inherited in contemporary experience. Posthuman philosophers must deal with the existential anxiety and tension inherited in human evolution. But these tensions and anxieties may be interpreted phenomenologically indicating the possibilities for a changed future. From my perspective, these phenomenological indications signal the beginning of the process of dehellenization of classical philosophy thus enabling a posthuman philosophy to be consciously constructed. Posthuman interpretation has no particular philosophy of its own, but must rely on a philosophy which arises out of the experience of the human community and its members. Posthuman philosophy does not rely on an ideology that exists independently of the philosopher's experience. Rather, posthuman philosophy, as phenomenological interpretation, has the potential to bring about an end to the perceived antithesis between classical humanism and the humanism developing in the contemporary technological and digital Western culture. Thus, any new human outcome may be neither classical, nor "virtual," but reflect a philosophical human self-consciousness.

## 2. SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

Our times require a posthuman theology to render Christian experience meaningful. In a posthuman theology I recognize *myself-as-subject* created in God's image and likeness. In traditional Western epistemology, which is not an epistemology of consciousness, this is not entirely possible. In Western epistemology I am a creature who acts within my own human sphere. Western epistemology is a philosophy of objectivism in which a thing is known more thoroughly by knowing more about the same thing, i.e., *quantitatively*. In a philosophy of consciousness supportive of a posthuman theology, I deepen, heighten or expand my self-understanding *qualitatively*. In deepening, heightening or expanding my present self-understanding, an earlier underdeveloped consciousness is recognized and there are profound theological implications here to do with truth as epistemologically understood.



Within my self-understanding, which means to be conscious, I distinguish between conformity and fidelity. Conformity establishes my relationship to another person, a relationship which I owe to the other person by reason of the nature of the other person. That is, I undertake the will of the other person. Fidelity also establishes my relationship to the other person, a relationship which I owe to myself by reason of my nature. That is, I undertake my will for the sake of the other person. From my experience conformity compels me externally, whereas fidelity impels me internally.

A philosophy of conscious self-understanding is the means by which I conceptualize my experience. Significantly, humanity is presently understood to be at an ex-animal stage of evolutionary development. As a human being able, as an ex-animal, to conceptualize God such conceptualization of God is a religious formulation based on the experience of my present culture. That is to say, in my experience God is revealed to me not in norms of universal conformity, but in norms of particular fidelity.

In a philosophy of conscious self-understanding (phenomenology) I experience God as that present other (“not-me”) presence which when it makes itself felt I become more than I would be, were I not exposed to its influence. To express religiously this, “becoming-more-than-I-would-be-were-I-not-exposed-to-its-influence” experience, through self-understanding reflects a posthuman theology. Were it not expressed *religiously*, it would be expressed as posthuman *psychology*. What needs to be proven to me from argument is not that God *exists*. Rather, what is required by me is the phenomenal appearance of what is not immediately obvious, i.e., God’s present *presence* to me. As a philosopher and theologian, I must first determine philosophically, and then express theologically, in what sense God is presently present to me.

Without question, my personality reflects my subjective self at any stage in my evolution. As an adult person, I desire to evolve, that is, direct my evolution beyond my present less-than-perfect self. If I interpret my religious experience through inherited traditions, I find I am looking to the past and not towards the future and beyond myself. In looking to the past, I recognize God’s power over me. Focused on the past, then, I remain a creature with no opportunity to evolve to a future (posthuman) co-creator status given the history of my religious experience. In a posthuman conscious self-understanding, the God beyond me does not have absolute *power over me* in the conventional sense. Rather, God’s

*power is shared with me* as a co-creator. That is to say that I may or may not choose to create my own life independently of God's purposes. I have the freedom to choose either path. I can rearrange the physical world (my environment) in ways by which I can serve God so as to realize the *autonomy of my own being*. (But I remain *homo faber*, and do not become *homo creator*.) Thus, the fundamental relation between God and me consists, not in the hierarchical power-relationship of creator-creature, but in a unity of God and me wherein I am a co-creator sharing the divine power. With this realization then, my faith becomes recast and the meaning I assign to religion is expressed in terms that do not imply God's absolute power over me, nor my inordinate submission to God's presence. This means that as a posthuman philosopher and theologian, I do not re-evaluate my ideological origins in order to refresh traditional perspectives. Rather, I re-evaluate my specific cultural and demographic traditions to establish a conscious self-understanding appropriate for a posthuman context. Through the perspective of a heightened self-consciousness, a new understanding comes to light displacing my ideological conceptions.

Re-visiting my ideological conceptions can be a negative or a positive experience which affects my theological understanding. Reflecting upon my experience negatively, I may conclude that civilization is dying. Things are not the way they once were. Life is decadent. The Christian moral values that I once acknowledged publicly are challenged within society and often appear as but conflicting opinions. Media headlines suggest to me that world destruction is near given the perpetual state of war and conflict in which the world seems to be engaged. The moral principles that formerly held life together seem to be disintegrating as the traditional supports of community social life are undermined.

A positive reflection, however, shows that the world continues despite my negative experiences. I, like many ordinary persons, am cheerful and optimistic. An ordinary person believes that life is good and he or she feels a part of a larger rhythm of creation despite its apparent chaos. Ordinary people often experience an abundance of the life in which to participate. Often this optimistic attitude is expressed through a spiritual, or through a religious life that is a vowed life, or even through a respectful secular attitude toward life and creation. Devout people often experience organized religion as one social reality among others similar to philosophical, political and economic realities, throughout the ages which have characterized human experience. Scholarship and the process of conscious

theological interpretation are not ends in themselves but are means of individual and collective human activity. Neither individual nor collective human activity produces any universal philosophical system of interpretation. No philosophical system of interpretation is permanent but only establishes temporary points of view that are contingent upon the cultural context of the philosopher.

Social institutions provide a cultural context for the philosopher and are the means whereby individuals are able to relate to each other. Family, government, church, agriculture, trade, etc. are evolutionary examples. The decay or the growth of any one of them will have a corresponding negative or positive affect on the individuals making up that institution. That is to say that theological interpretation based on a conscious self-understanding cannot take place in a self-limiting and self-isolating context characteristic of decay. Rather, it requires a constructive and supportive context for evolution to enhance humanity.

To this end a posthuman theologians possess their own special self-conscious evolution with respect to knowledge and human activity. Supported by this conscious self-understanding, posthuman theologians engage emotion, feelings and intuition enabling a transcendent encounter since human consciousness extends beyond sensible experience. A purpose of this brief book is to provide an appropriate example of Christian posthuman theological interpretation thus avoiding the distortions of philosophical ideology, the distortions of fantasy and the distortions of any uncritical “new age” thought. Posthuman theologians presume that a relationship between God and humanity has been established on the level of a unique personal self-understanding with distinctive philosophical (phenomenological) insights.

Classical Hellenist philosophies were formulated in response to different problems and within a different cultural world. Thus, they reflect the historical experience of the human condition of their time. A posthuman philosophy, to which I subscribe, supports the co-creative evolution of human becoming. Within co-creative evolution each new point of view, or new level of consciousness, humanity transcends any previous philosophical self-conception. Thus, as co-creator of the cosmos, humanity is able to structure the order and harmony of the universe with the aid of a phenomenological philosophy, in lieu of an epistemological philosophy.

### 3. THE SEPARATION OF PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

In our present intellectual climate, many of the new age perspectives undertaken in seeking knowledge of ourselves are likely to be short-lived in terms of the longevity of ideas. In other words, they are “trendy” for a while. A case in point, to my mind, is the current hybrid understanding of science and philosophy. An imaginative entity emerges upon the integration of elements of scientific and philosophical understanding. The imaginative entity of such integration of scientific and philosophical thinking for attaining human knowledge may be more of a hindrance than a help. Every action in which I am engaged at any given moment is susceptible to philosophical interpretation. Every action I undertake at any given moment is susceptible to scientific explanation. The moment I begin consciously questioning my scientific activity it is a philosophical question of interpretation, and no longer solely a question of scientific explanation. To my mind, the two disciplines are distinct as to their purposes and ought not be conflated. Science and philosophy must remain distinct approaches to knowledge, although related they are related.

Knowing myself better is a prime purpose of my philosophy. Generally, philosophers seek in the notion of God (or in some sort of absolute principle) the reconciliation of a conflict which is felt within themselves as well as among themselves and within their world. In short, they tend to seek unity as a goal of their experience. This, I suggest, is a misdirection due to the Hellenist understanding of knowledge carried over into modern philosophy. My experience indicates clearly that evolution tends to diversity, not to uniformity; to plurality, not to unity. In short, my experience does not conform to the Hellenist philosophical understanding that humanity is heading *towards* unity, but *away* from it.

I am, as a thinking organism, capable of distinguishing between myself as subject and myself as object. This distinction is achieved through a process of differentiation which occurs within through consciousness. This process of differentiation reinforces my integrity as a person. Following Auguste Sabatier’s suggestion, I envision my consciousness similar to an ellipse, as it were, possessing *two centres of activity*. One centre is receptive of information through sensation and is *passive*. The other centre is creative of

meaning and is *active*. Sabatier writes: “The line of the ellipse described by the relation and the distance of these two centres is the approximate but never perfect synthesis of the two *kinds* of data which thus arrive in consciousness” (my italics).<sup>1</sup> Were the two centres ever to merge perfectly a circle would result, symbolic of perfect unity. But if my experience is any guide this can never happen. Hence, I redirect my efforts philosophically and understand that diversity, not unity, is the projected end of my interpreted experience. On the other hand, my theology (faith seeking understanding) favours outcomes that are somehow unified with respect to this ellipse. Given this ellipsis theory just mentioned, I have found that Daniel Guerrière’s understanding of theology satisfactory. “Theology remains the self-knowledge of faith for the sake of faith. It compromises a systematic (or dogmatic) and a practical (or pastoral) endeavor, each with a methodological (or dialectical) moment.”<sup>2</sup>

My mind is an activity of my brain. It is an abstracted activity understood as distinct, but related to my body. Thus, my conscious mind, or my conscious mental activity, is literally a metaphysical activity. In an opposing view, reductionists hold that the mind is the brain, or, more accurately that conscious mental activity is identical with physical neural activity. This identification with physical neural activity is a “red herring” which is part of the artificial philosophical problem that is caused by integrating science into the philosophical understanding of the mind. There is no need to merge science with philosophy in order to understand the mind. Historically, each has had a role to play and continues to have a role to play independently within human consciousness. Philosophically, I understand this approach as a duality, not dualism, and believe that conscious mental activity, or mind, is constitutionally different from anything in the physical world. Mind and matter are of two distinct *orders*.

It is possible that the metaphysical activity of my mind coincides with the physical life of my brain as a living organism. However, it is not necessarily so. The two are not connected in any manner of identification, but are only reciprocally related. The conclusion I ultimately draw, then, is that my consciousness (a metaphysical activity of my mind) cannot be identical with anything physical, because there is no causal *connection* between

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<sup>1</sup> *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion* George H Doran (1897:303).

<sup>2</sup> *Phenomenology of the Truth Proper to Religion* State University of New York Press (1990:10).

the mental and the physical. Only a *relationship* exists between the physical and the mental, which is not necessarily a causal connection, although it may be so in certain cases.<sup>3</sup> On the macroscopic level my consciousness is a movement on my part as an observer which brings about no change in that which I observe. Thus, the current the presumption of a connection between science and philosophy is unnecessary chaff and, in fact, a mistaken understanding of their relationship. To my mind, attention would be better focused on the relationship of the two as independent, but related, disciplines.

A suggestion put forth in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is that some form of materialism is probably much more widely held today than in centuries past. No doubt part of the reason for this has to do with the increase in scientific knowledge concerning the working of the brain and its misunderstood relationship to the conscious mind. (This includes any relationship between a physically damaged brain and various degrees of unconscious activity.)

The *Encyclopedia* also notes that it is difficult to see any real connection between specific conscious states and the physical brain that *explains* just how or why conscious states are identical with the physical brain. That is to say that some philosophers conclude that an explanatory gap exists between the physical and mental which is not yet overcome. To my mind, there is not a true “gap” between the two as if one did not influence the other. But this “gap” is constituted by the misconceived connections between the mental and the physical. Again, from my perspective, this gap is artificially produced by well-intentioned, but misguided, academics who try to establish the existence of connections in order to close any gap where they should understand relationships. When such academics are theologians, I find it disconcerting that their theology seems to be “immature.” Brian Gaybba understands that:

The degree of academic maturity of *any* theology can be measured by the extent to which it is *conscious of* and examines its own presuppositions and methodology. It is therefore a sign of the maturity of monastic theology that several of its practitioners pondered the *epistemological presuppositions* of a

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<sup>3</sup> An example could be that an organism becomes necessarily constituted or composed as human at a certain point of proximity in the distance (space) of the relationship between the mental state of the organism and its physical matter. Should the mental state of the organism and its matter separate and become too far apart in distance (space), the human organism would cease to exist, that is, it would de-compose.

theology that places experiencing the divine at the very heart of its methodology (my italics).<sup>4</sup>

Some of the questions that gave rise to the essays in the book have been discussed in the *Internet Encyclopedia*. As well, some questions in this collection of essays recall Auguste Sabatier's perspective to these same issues. Such questions are: Could there be two centers (poles) to conscious activity (subjective/objective) in one mind? What makes a person the same person (a *continuum*) over time? What makes a person, a *person* (an identity) at any given moment? These questions are closely related to the traditional epistemological problem of personal individuality, which is also linked to self-consciousness, not just consciousness. It is significant that only persons can be self-conscious. To my mind, a satisfactory resolution to these questions requires a philosophical methodology that remains distinct from, and not merged with a scientific methodology. In short, an anthropological philosophy of consciousness that keeps philosophy and science separate is needed.

#### 4. PHILOSOPHICAL POSTHUMAN THEISM

Posthuman life consists of many interpretations within contemporary academia which in fact amounts to a shift in the Western philosophical context, both speculative and existential. I say "posthuman," not "post-classical," because while at first blush it may appear that Western philosophy has advanced beyond the classical age of philosophy, techno-digital intervention (unavailable in the classical age) may have altered the human being's status within creation vis à vis nature. That is to say, "when computer science is combined with quantum physics and nanotechnology, the result may soon be a combination of a human being and machine."<sup>5</sup> Philosophical interpretations in the future will not be able to be made via the classical perspectives of the past. European philosophy has given rise to a technological civilization. What makes this drive to technology so strong is that philosophers still believe that they are working to liberate mankind from its earlier fetters imposed by the natural order and tradition. In George Grant's words:

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<sup>4</sup> *God's Wisdom and Human Reason* University of South Africa Press (1998:10).

<sup>5</sup> Hellsten, Sirkku (2012:5) "The Meaning of Life" during a Transition from Modernity to Transhumanism, in *Journal of Anthropology*. [doi: 10.1155/2012/210684].



Man has at last come of age in the evolutionary process, has taken his fate into his own hands and is freeing himself for happiness against the old necessities of hunger and disease and overwork, and the consequent oppressions and repressions. The conditions of nature—that “otherness”—which so long enslaved us, when they appeared as a series of unknown forces, are now at last beginning to be understood in their workings so that they can serve our freedom.<sup>6</sup>

All aspects of contemporary life are affected by this new technological paradigm which raises new philosophical problems the solution of which cannot always be anticipated in advance. Our lived situation is existential, not theoretical, and we are “here” already in a new philosophical “land” that is, in fact, a *terra incognita*. With respect to religion in general and, the Christian religion in particular, philosophers are uncertain about their understanding of the faith. In posthumanism, the central philosophical question about God becomes not “does God exist?” a classical philosophical question, but, rather “what place in human consciousness does God occupy, if any?” To answer this question the posthuman philosopher and theologian need, at the very least, to recompose “classical” humanism which requires an historical understanding of how humanity has arrived where it is today. Among the many factors that I could have selected to recompose humanism, I consider the notion of the evolution of human consciousness to be key in presenting posthuman (dehellenized) theism. The evolution of human consciousness discloses a philosophical attitude that is not confrontational or polemical, but allows for an interpretation of, and by, the human being as effected by the intervention of technology and scientific progress.

My perspective on the topic of eco-philosophy in light of a dehellenized Western theism is not speculative, as is David Roden’s (2015) *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human*, but, rather existential following the perspective that Rosi Braidotti gives in her Yale University Lectures (2017) “Memoires of a Posthumanist” and “Aspirations of a Posthumanist.”<sup>7</sup> Sirkku Hellsten notes that “the neo-holistic view of the universe and the human place in it requires us to consider the ‘existential risks’ and seriously ponder the effects of the technological evolution to our social, cultural, ethical

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<sup>6</sup> Grant, George (1969:28) *Technology and Empire* Anansi.

<sup>7</sup> Available on YouTube.



and metaphysical frameworks and normative principles.”<sup>8</sup> In presenting my ideas I do not undertake a confrontational approach. Rather, I suggest an evolutionary approach which is not characterized by an architectural, that is, constructive process of building an ideology, but rather an existential process reflecting an organic evolutionary development and transcendental purpose of human consciousness. In George Grant’s words:

It is now generally assumed that the race has meaning (call it if you will purpose) only on the condition that we view ourselves as purposive and that none of those views are truths concerning the nature of things, but only ideologies which we create to justify our man-made purposes. There is no objective purpose to human or non-human nature which men can come to know and in terms of which the various occasions of life can be ordered. Purpose and value are the creations of human will in an essentially purposeless world.<sup>9</sup>

Human consciousness is an evolutionary product understood within posthuman philosophy as capable of leading to an entity that may be no longer *traditionally* human as a consequence of technological alteration, according to some contemporary thinkers. In short, it is not the creature generated via science fiction upon which I speculate but the transformed and transforming human being. My mind is similar to that of David Roden who notes that science fiction writers have trafficked in posthumans of various sizes and shapes for nearly a century, a new organic humanity will not come about through the addition of parts, like the unnamed creature in Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, but through evolution of the primal individual. Were such posthuman creatures capable of being produced, there is no need to suggest that they would be greater or better than the humans that created them. A true posthuman philosophical problem is the religious one that first needs a working hypothesis before understanding posthuman theism. As Roden correctly recognizes, “Thus any philosophical theory of posthumanism owes us an account of what it means to be human such that it is conceivable that there could be nonhuman successors to humans.”<sup>10</sup> Since nonhuman successors are theoretical entities this begs the philosophical question: “where will posthumans philosophically locate God?” rather than: “Does God exist?” As

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<sup>8</sup> op. cit. Hellsten (2012:1).

<sup>9</sup> op. cit. Grant (1969:128).

<sup>10</sup> Roden (2015:6).

Leslie Dewart notes, “But the obviousness of the existence of God and his providence is gone. What is not gone is God.”<sup>11</sup>

I do not write of a “philosophy of God” because that phrase denotes a particular area of philosophical systematization within an extensive history of various schools of thought. Rather, I explore more deeply the philosophical perspective of William James (1842-1919). After noting that popular opinion accepts the existence of an “ideal power,” James wrote:

Meanwhile the practical needs and experiences of religion seem to me sufficiently met by the belief that beyond each man and in a fashion continuous with him there exists a larger power which is friendly to him and to his ideals. All that the facts require is that the power should be both other and larger than our conscious selves. Anything larger will do, if only it be large enough to trust for the next step. It need not be infinite, it need not be solitary. *It might conceivably even be only a larger and more godlike self*, of which the present self would then be but the mutilated expression, and the universe might conceivably be a collection of such selves, of different degrees of inclusiveness, with no absolute unity realized in it at all” [my italics].<sup>12</sup>

A “posthuman” approach within philosophy is not (as yet, at least) a clearly identifiable school of thought but is merely a movement within general Western philosophy. This movement is, however, a global approach to interpreting reality which, to my mind, is characteristic of the human manner of thinking. The term “global,” as I understand it, is inclusive of cultural peculiarities which a term like “universal” is not.

It should be more evident in the fictitious interview with Leslie Dewart that the notion of philosophical dehellenization as understood by him, and critically introduced by him throughout all his books characterizes the existential posthuman philosophical perspective that I endorse.<sup>13</sup> It should also be evident that the interview reflects an approach to a dehellenized philosophical approach to God that has evolved beyond classical humanism.

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<sup>11</sup> Dewart (2016:200) *Hume’s Challenge and the Renewal of Modern Philosophy* Posthumously published privately.

<sup>12</sup> James, William (2002:570) *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* Modern Library Paperbacks.

<sup>13</sup> This interview also appears in my *On Posthuman Theism: “God Consciousness and Leslie Dewart (1922-2009).*

That is why I have presented an interview in the form of a fictitious dialogue.<sup>14</sup> In reading this fictitious interview, I would encourage an hesitant reader to persevere through to the end to gain a sense of my present philosophical perspective in this book.

In its broadest sense as a philosophical term, I understand “humanism” to be that view of life in which the welfare and happiness of persons, individually and collectively, are primary. The understanding of the term has evolved over the years within the western philosophical schools which have a varied history. At the particular time of the Renaissance, humanism rebelled against the perceived limitations of classical religious knowledge in light of the revival in general learning. This revival of general learning encouraged the celebration of human existence to the full. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a naturalistic form of humanism developed which rejected all forms of the supernatural as religious, exclusively relying on reason, science and political democracy for a solution to humanity’s problems.

Beginning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century another perspective has started to appear within western philosophical thought — “posthumanism.” The posthumanism perspective arises from humanism and is gaining acceptance among philosophers as an approach to deconstructing the inherited ideas, or notions, of humanism.

The prefix “post” suggests a view as “following upon” humanism, but not in a sequential order such that the posthuman order *necessarily* comes after the human order surpassing or nullifying it. In other words, posthumanity did not have to develop chronologically as an evolutionary philosophical perspective of humanism.<sup>15</sup> It has not been “fated” to appear, but rather was chosen (formulated) by Western philosophers as a new interpretive perspective.<sup>16</sup> Posthumanity is a self-conscious, self-discovery of a new human concept for a discourse within the philosophical experience that coexists alongside the classical understanding of experience. That is, the former does not replace the latter.

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<sup>14</sup> Warburton, Nigel & Edmonds, David note that a dialogue format presents an advantage over a plain text format in that dialogue offers an opportunity for explanation. “The questioner can stop the flow and seek clarification, or throw in an apparent counter-example so as to better understand what the other person means.” *Philosophy Bites* Oxford University Press (2010:xi).

<sup>15</sup> I speak of the qualitative meaning of posthumanity as opposed to the quantitative meaning of posthumanism throughout this book.

<sup>16</sup> Concerning “fate” Robert Adolfs has noted: “It would be entirely wrong to see the course of events in the world as caused by blind fate, by divine providence or by some other mindless process in nature.” *The Grave of God* Harper & Row (1966:61).

Further, critical posthumanity takes in questions of the meaning of globalization, technoscience, capitalism, climate change, etc. that deliberately blur the demarcation between fiction and fact, imagination and reality, and reality and virtual reality. In light of such blurring, my focus at this stage on posthuman thinking presents an attempt at understanding human discourse as it affects religious belief. While I undertake this focus within Western Christianity, I suggest that the following philosophical remarks, with proper adjustments, may be legitimately applied within any cultural understanding of God, or the gods.

Posthumanity, as I interpret the notion, functions more like a review, or exegesis, of the interpretation of human experience that asks questions like: How did we come to think of ourselves as human? What exactly does it mean to be consciously human? What are the implications for nonhuman entities, such as animals, machines (computers), God, and the environment in a posthuman context? A *critical* posthuman approach is one that distinguishes between a popular (*uncritical*) and a philosophical (*reflective*) approach that investigates the meaning of human activity. The reader should bear in mind that the reflection on theism in this book has been influenced by Leslie Dewart whose philosophical perspective was in turn influenced by that of José Ortega y Gasset. José Franquiz notes that Oretga y Gasset (1883-1955) held to the principle:

“I am myself plus my circumstances,” is one pole of the philosophical problem of life. The other is reason. The two poles function together, but not in dialectical opposition, but through necessary coexistence. Life does not consist in being (as a static concept), but in coming-to-be (as a movement) in which direction, purpose, and values are realized. Time-wise, the present and the past become articulated and meaningful only in relation to the future. <sup>17</sup>

Basically, what is at stake in posthuman philosophy is a rethinking of the relationship between human agency and the role of technology, environmental and cultural factors which draw together a number of aspects that make up humanity’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century understanding of reality and cosmology. Posthuman philosophy links these aspects to their beginnings which have been disclosed within the history of philosophical understanding. The words of Charles Moeller capture the genesis of this book.

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<sup>17</sup> Runes, Dagobert s. v. Ortega y Gasset, *Dictionary of Philosophy, Ancient, Medieval and Modern* (1963).

Revolution is out of date, outmoded, because the problems have become so complex, for instance from the economic and social point of view, that the best way to spoil everything is to work in a whirlwind. What is required is patience, attention, competence. ... What is of primary importance is interhuman relations. If we are not successful in creating among men, clans, races, nations, a *consciousness of humanity*, we will never get anywhere. [my italics] <sup>18</sup>

## 5. THE SHIFT TO POSTHUMAN THEISM

Life presents us with different experiences, each true, but not in the manner we may have previously thought. That is to say, not on the experience, or a collection of experiences, exhausts the truthfulness of the reality in which we live. I have been educated conventionally through a traditional Western intellectual, rational, philosophical and scientific approach. To accept the persuasiveness of this system was to attain to the truth, I was told. I understood this system to reveal life's end and purpose. To reach out and grasp truth intellectually was the means which allowed me to understand and master my life and physical environment. Classically, this understanding is understood in philosophy as *apprehending* the world objectively through experience. This system would account for my place in the cosmos. But, given the limited success at understanding and accounting for my place in the cosmos, I became puzzled about the effectiveness of this system. I was not satisfied to remain puzzled, however. I came to realize that I required a philosophy in life that clarifies my experiences, and at the same time, promotes opportunities for the advancement of a new philosophical understanding.

In determining such a philosophy, the first of two assumptions that I made was that philosophical advancement must be a progressive adaptation in understanding the world through human consciousness, since only humans philosophize. Philosophically, I am conscious of the relationship between objects in my world that are subjectively *comprehended* (not apprehended) by me. That is to say, I make judgements about the

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<sup>18</sup> Møller, Charles (1968:437) "Renewal of the Doctrine of Man" in *Renewal of Religious Structures, Proceedings of the Congress on the Theology of Renewal of the Church Centenary of Canada 1867-1967* Vol 2 Palm Publishers.

relationships among the objects in my world of experience. As well, other individual human worlds are not only physically *connected* to mine, they are *related* to me existentially. Connections, as I understand them are concrete presences that constitute the context for infrahuman and human organisms. Relationships, on the other hand, constitute the metaphysical (notional) reality of human and infrahuman organisms, as well as, in animate objects relationships which disclose my presence to other objects in the concrete world.

Life, obviously, is a necessary pre-requisite for the human mind which is the generator of philosophy. Life is the *sine qua non* of human existence, as the scholastics phrased it. Computers, which do not participate in life, do not think — they merely compute. But I think, and computers are made to help me in my thinking. (I recall that as a student I typed my thoughts on a portable typewriter made for typing, not thinking.)

In my daily life, I may give myself to life's work, life's objectives and purposes, but fail to give myself to life itself. Any philosophy that offers me only explanatory causes of my life's works, objectives and purposes dissatisfies me. My dissatisfaction probably arises because such a philosophy ultimately reduces my life to a mere technological science. To alleviate this dissatisfaction, I must assign meaning to my experience in life and not accept only the significance of scientific discovery. In assigning meaning to my life, I differentiate both my character and presence within the cosmos through a philosophical contemplation that distinguishes "me" from that which is "not-me." In my life-world, I experience *being* as it is in itself, not *reality* as it is in itself. In other words, I experience that which is finite (being), not that which is infinite (reality). Contrary to the classical understanding I inherited, I cannot conceptualize reality, since it is beyond intelligible being. Reality, without becoming exhausted, is that out of which being is differentiated — an understanding I initially received from Leslie Dewart.

As a thinking finite being, my philosophical dissatisfaction grew as I tried to interpret my experiences with some degree of accuracy realizing that I am not flawless. Given minimal success with traditional Western philosophy, I sought a philosophical solution elsewhere and not within the tradition I had inherited. However, even then, my philosophical concepts which were meaningful to me and to other persons, still remained inadequate.

The classical approach, which I had been using, is built upon a Hellenistic foundation which led to the idea of a universal Reason ultimately reconciling all variation and chaos within itself. From a religious point of view, I had understood this universal Reason as God. In the mind of many of the Eastern (Asian) philosophers a corresponding notion of the universal Reason is the “One” recognized by their scholars as constituting ultimate reality. As W. T. Chan writes:

There was the Ying Yang school which emphasized ying and yang as the two fundamental principles, always contrasting but complementary, and underlying all conceivable objects, qualities, situations, and relationships. It was this school that provided a common ground for the fusion of ancient divergent philosophical tendencies in medieval China. ... China developed her own Buddhist philosophy consistent with her general philosophical outlook. We need only mention the Hun-yen school which offered a totalistic philosophy of ‘all in one’ and ‘one in all,’ the T’ien-t’ai school which believes in the identity of the Void, Transitoriness, and the Mean. ... These schools have persisted because they accept both noumenon and phenomenon, both *ens* and non-*ens*, and this ‘both-and’ spirit is predominately characteristic of Chinese philosophy.

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Currently, my understanding of reality is that which I reside *in*. Reality is not *beside* me, *with* me, nor pervades *through* me. Rather, I am in it. Phenomenologically, reality is and remains an unknown “necessity.” Thus, I live in a philosophical mystery, not in an intellectual puzzle, and I experience aspects of that mystery as being both concrete and transcendent. Were my life merely a puzzle I would be able to solve it scientifically. Further, this philosophical mystery is the source of my seemingly incurable restlessness. When conscious, I envision (differentiate) concepts from within this reality of what it means “to be.” In phenomenological philosophy, notions that arise out of reality must reflect in some manner what it means “to be.” This philosophical conviction is common to all humanity within the diverse cultural conceptualizations of its formulation.

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<sup>19</sup> Chan, W T (1963:51) s. v. “Chinese Philosophy” in Dagobert Runes *Dictionary of Philosophy, Ancient, Medieval and Modern*.

My second assumption is that reality is beyond the human ability to be comprehended in itself, since it is tantamount to life. Here I accept Leslie Dewart's understanding of reality as *non-being* or that which is beyond being, a notion he introduced in, *The Future of Belief: Theism Come of Age*.<sup>20</sup> Life is dynamic and comprehended only limitedly by the human organism which participates in its fullness. To my mind, it is of the "nature" of life to communicate itself to concrete being in the guise of an individual organism. Thus, the dynamic (the life) of a living infrahuman organism may be conceived by humans as *purposive*, but such a dynamic is only *purposeful* when consciously initiated by human organisms. At this evolutionary stage, the human organism is a unique conscious manifestation of life.

Classical Christian understanding given its philosophy and subsequent theology teaches that God made humanity in the likeness and image of God. Thus, in light of the history of Western philosophy, perceiving life ultimately as "God" or "gods" is understandable. However, an alternative philosophical interpretation is possible. The history of ideas demonstrates this and I offer the thinking of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) as an example. For him, God is only the conceptual projection of the ideal man. Yet, according to the editors of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Although Feuerbach denied that he was an atheist, he nevertheless contended that the God of Christianity is an illusion."<sup>21</sup> Philosophizing about the transcendent or the super-natural is a "natural" human activity — although not universal o all humans. As Dewart has noted:

Both the phenomenal and the ontic "gods," notwithstanding their exalted status and wonderful characteristics (e.g., extraordinary powers, elusiveness, and, not infrequently, immortality), are man's fellow inhabitants of this world and neither more nor less real than all other worldly entities; *invisibilia* rather than "gods" would be a much better name for them.<sup>22</sup>

Herein began my shift to posthuman theism.

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<sup>20</sup> Dewart's distinction of reality as "beyond being" has been cited by Robert Prentice (1971:240) "Fundamental Dehellenization. An Analysis and Critique of Dewart's *The Foundations of Belief*" in *Antonionum* Vols. 2 & 3, pp. 205-297.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ludwig-Feuerbach>.

<sup>22</sup> Dewart (1989:314).



## 6. PHILOSOPHY IN A NEW KEY

### An alternative discourse

As a Christian philosopher, I must find a way of making space for various kinds of philosophical discourse in the church and not rely solely on the classical philosophical perspective. In attempting to understand homosexuality, by way of example, one such alternative philosophical discourse has been introduced by Michel Foucault (1926-1984). From Foucault's sociological perspective, discourses are understood in terms of the knowledge and power that are inherent in them and, as such, play a major role in understanding homosexuality. George Drazenovich notes that "as a historical matter, Foucault suggests that in the Western world, secularity as a political, medical and juridical discourse accelerated in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries," along with the power they represented.<sup>23</sup> I have this type of secular philosophical discourse in mind as I present a reflective and historical account of the development of my philosophical thinking from my undergraduate years to the writing of this book — arriving not at the classical perspective, but a phenomenological one — but not one that is necessarily exclusively secular.

Like many other students throughout history, I began serious philosophical questioning during my undergraduate years while studying classical philosophy at a Catholic college. Later, I came to view classical philosophy as inadequate for my theological interpretation. But this development was not immediate, nor total. Initially, I began taking from classical philosophy what worked and rejected what was irrelevant in my experience at that time. And ultimately came to realize that classical philosophy is not the necessary and unique philosophical underpinning of human thinking. Alternatives are possible.

These days, I undertake my theological interpretation from within a dehellenized philosophy. A dehellenized understanding is not a fixed understanding but a dynamic point of view that is perpetually undergoing evolution and reconstruction. In short, dehellenized understanding discloses a phenomenological point of view. Currently, I interpret philosophy and theology phenomenologically through the relationships that I cultivate

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<sup>23</sup> "Foucauldian Analysis of Homosexuality" in *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (2010:3)  
doi.10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00563.x.

within my community of faith. The question that I had often ask myself amounted to: Am I to consciously construct the future of my belief, or am I to remain satisfied with a pre-critical, inherited belief? Looking to the future, the problem is that it may not be possible to give any concrete shape to the final philosophical goal in my life. However, I try to accomplish in my life something similar to what philosophers have always tried to accomplish. That is, to arrange my ideas into an insightful mosaic of a personal, but not private, set of meanings – and in my case, inspired by Leslie Dewart’s project.<sup>24</sup>

### The shift to a new philosophical genre

In my philosophical career I have written a variety of books. These books reveal how my philosophical and theological thinking has been continually developing. Although not initially intended as such, when understood collectively they form a type of intellectual history of the development of my thought, as it were. My philosophical and theological development would eventually lead me to recognize that the interpretation of queer issues as they are developing today need an appropriate philosophical and theological underpinning. Traditional philosophy and theology fail in establishing an appropriate interpretation of queer experience because of their inadequate epistemological principles. This is not to gainsay any scientific, psychological, social or cultural efforts at understanding queer issues. I am not alone in understanding this inadequacy. Concerning the role of phenomenology as it replaces classical philosophy, Ronald Long concludes:

I know full well that phenomenology fails as a science. What I hope is that I have given an account which is sufficiently true to sever the equation of treating another as a sexual object with abuse and to establish a recognition of the validity that casual sex can have in the life of a gay man as a vehicle of his ‘humanization’ — a process which some of us recognize as the substance of spirituality.<sup>25</sup>

Phenomenological interpretation became for me the new way of theologically re-interpreting my experience free from the constraints of classical understanding. I do not

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<sup>24</sup> *Evolution and Consciousness. The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* University of Toronto Press (1989:xi).

<sup>25</sup> “Toward a Phenomenology of Gay Sex: Groundwork for a Contemporary Sexual Ethics” in *Embodying Diversity: (Bio) Diversity and Sexuality* Monument Press (1995:105).

say that classical understanding is erroneous, but rather that it is inadequate for the contemporary interpretation of my experience. My experience of the inadequacy of classical philosophy, that had been growing since I entered university, soon became philosophical dissatisfaction. And that dissatisfaction translated into a sense of rootlessness regarding my philosophical belief which I eventually concluded was due to this outdated classical philosophy. But there is more.

The fact was that I was searching for a new philosophical *genre* to interpret my experience. I took heart when I discovered within my studies that Vatican II had embraced a phenomenological approach to the understanding of itself — even if many delegates who attended the Council did not recognize, nor understand what they were living through in attempting an *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* of the teaching of the Catholic faith. The *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* approaches to interpreting the church's teaching led to a personal religious self-transformation which was no longer a surrendering of my will to that of another, but an act of adjustment in my relationships between and among those around me, including God. In short, *adjustment* to the present presence of God replaced submission to the *will* of God. Adjustments concerning my relationship with God meant that I had “come of age” responsibly in living my life. God was not totally responsible for everything anymore. I was now co-responsible agent with God in living out my life.

The realization that God was not responsible for everything anymore amounted to a philosophical shock for me. However, it did mark a definite and identifiable turning point in my thinking. It opened the door whereby I changed my attitude and disposition to the future in creating the culture and society of my life-world.

Eventually, in co-creating my life-world I accepted faith, not as a “gift” or ability to believe given to me from outside by another agency, i.e., God. Rather, I became conscious of my faith as an act of understanding *within* God.<sup>26</sup> Within the presence of God, I began to deconstruct my inherited Hellenist philosophy which eventually led to my abandonment of classical metaphysics in interpreting my experience. In short, I no longer held to a substantive metaphysics in my theology and as of late have begun taking into account the

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<sup>26</sup> If I were writing in Greek, I would write *ἐν* (in) for “within,” suggesting the notion of “already being within being.” I would not write *εἰς* (into) for “within” which suggests “moving into being,” from the outside.

insights of “quantum” thought. Within this process, the realization that theology was no longer the “Queen of the Sciences” required a significant intellectual adjustment. I had first encountered this notion of theology as “Queen of the Sciences” in my undergraduate years. At that time, I had no sense of the profound effect it was to have on my philosophical inheritance and would have on my future philosophical development. The theological insights of George Tyrrell (1861-1909), an underappreciated Irish-English theologian, caught my attention at university. I recognized that much of my thought was, in fact, resonating with his. In delving into his life and work I found sound philosophical support for replacing my classical philosophical inheritance with a phenomenological perspective. And therein began my entry into the deliberate dehellenization of Western philosophical understanding.

Encountering George Tyrrell’s works marked the beginning of a shift in reinterpreting my experience from a negative (deconstructive) to a positive (reconstructive) approach in developing an alternative philosophical understanding, that is, doing philosophy (and theology) in a new key. My questions were no longer phrased: What are *you* going to do about this problem, Lord? But, rather: What are *we* going to do about this problem, Lord? In other words, I included myself in the question and in its solution. The process of reconstructing my philosophy phenomenologically took on the awareness that subjectivity and objectivity are not to be confused with subjectivism and objectivism. I continue to engage the world I have inherited (i. e., objectivity) *and* the world that I have constituted for myself (i. e., subjectivity). But objectivity and subjectivity do not constitute two worlds in themselves, but only the one world in which I am conscious. As phenomenologically understood, objectivity and subjectivity are poles of meaning, not poles of fact. That is to say that in the world of concrete reality there are facts which are “there” as independent reality distinct from the meaning that I assign to them.

Today, my approach in philosophical understanding and subsequent theological interpretation is outside the guild of classical theological argument. The theological reflection that I now undertake in an ecclesial context differs from the reflection I undertook in an ecclesiastical context. Although my thinking may have begun in the formality of the academy (university), it has not remained in the formality of the academy.

My thinking addresses the questions and problems that arise within all contexts of my experience including those questions that address queer consciousness.

I am often led to ask myself: Is church membership a prerequisite for doing theology? Can I consciously construct Catholic theology outside of the community of Christ's revelation? My answer, to date, is that in order to construct a Catholic theology, I need to "enchurch" my thinking somehow. To "enchurch" my thinking, however, is not to make it dependent upon the doctrinal or dogmatic ideas of a classical period. Rather, enchurching my theology includes the reading and digesting of texts of other philosophers and theologians, who raise existential philosophical questions of life and not just questions applicable to institutional Christendom. In other words, I take into account the relationship between the belief of the church community and the belief of the non-church community and, as well, the difference that it makes.

Existential questions, not ideological ones, preoccupy me today. Yet, I may not know how to ask all the right questions, much less have all the right answers. My philosophy and theology are nothing but the *interpretation* of my religious experience, a philosophical concern. They are not an *explanation* of my religious experience, a scientific concern. As noted earlier, as a philosopher/theologian, there are certain negative experiences that need to be acknowledged in my life. But they are not of necessity.<sup>27</sup> They do not constitute any part of God (*a parte Dei*). In short, *a partis hominis* and *a parte Dei* constitute the two poles of philosophical interpretation and scientific explanation in my phenomenological consciousness.

#### An altered theological future

In my initial philosophical contemplation, that is, in my pre-phenomenological days, I found myself living a life that I did not make or design, but had inherited. In all that, however, I knew that I could not stop my life from continually evolving and I saw indications of an alternative philosophical understanding leading to an altered theological future. As I see it, the possible reshaping of the future, through theology in a new key, is

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<sup>27</sup> Here I follow Kant's comment in his *Prolegomena*. "Now experience does indeed teach me what exists and what it is like, but never that it must *necessarily* be so and not otherwise" (my italics) Manchester University Press (1959:52). That is, life need not be lived negatively, one can adopt a positive attitude.

but the other side of analyzing the past. In this process, I understand the past as not merely *related to* the present but as *leading to* the present. In other words, I review the conscious choices that brought me to the present moment. My reflections in these essays continue the *unfinished theological business* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, namely the so-called Modernist Movement, or Modernist Crisis, if viewed from within the church's perspective.<sup>28</sup>

My work as a theologian today is undertaken differently than such work undertaken in the days of the theological systems which dominated the medieval universities. Developments in philosophy have always preceded developments in theology, similar to myth and folk lore preceding philosophy. In light of the history of human thinking there is likely to be no final philosophy or theology. Given that understanding, I see my task as primarily to make known, or to provide interpretive approaches to the abiding truths of Christianity for future generations. My quest for "truth" today requires that philosophy be undertaken in a new key. Philosophy in a new key is the quest for being oneself within the evolution of the world. But not in the process of the evolution that brought "humanity down from the trees," but, rather in the evolutionary process that may make it possible for humanity "to climb to the stars" through a self-directed stage of evolutionary development, something the brute animal cannot do. Philosophical understanding of theology ranks first in the chronological order of knowledge. However, for the Christian an understanding of theology is primary within the moral order of knowledge. And any contemporary understanding must preserve this order.

To my mind, Leslie Dewart's understanding of "dehellenization," not to be confused with "unhellenization," provides an opportunity for a fresh reflection upon philosophy. After graduation, I followed Leslie Dewart's thinking, not to know primarily "what he had in mind," but rather, "what I had in mind." Today, knowing what I have in mind, requires understanding my *consciousness*, or my capacity to be cognizant, which enables me to take

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<sup>28</sup> The chief understanding of ecclesiastical modernism has been as a label for the outlook of a group of Roman Catholic thinkers. This group was given both its public identity and its (seeming) death sentence by the encyclical *Pascendi* issued by Pope Pius X in 1907. Its leaders were George Tyrrell (1861-1909) in England, Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) in France, and Ernesto Buonaiuti (1881-1946) in Italy, priests who felt challenged by the critical studies of Christianity's origins. They regarded Roman Catholic dogmas and devotions as valuable, and helpful symbols of faith and the spiritual life, but they believed that a fuller Catholicism (better known today as Catholicity) was being born.

on a creative role in life. Phenomenological consciousness, or what is the same thing, dehellenized consciousness, is not on a par with normal consciousness. Phenomenological consciousness raises my philosophical awareness to *a higher level of intelligibility* than classical understanding which lacks the capacity to express contemporary experience satisfactorily. It is unfortunate at this time in the advancement of ideas in the Western world that the place of philosophy in relation to theology seems to have been usurped, to a great degree, by sociology and psychology which have their roots in Hellenistic understanding. Mel Thompson has expressed metaphorically, what I have suspected for some time now, that with sociology and psychology dominating the philosophical field “much western philosophy stopped playing the game and merely analyzed the rule-book.”<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately, I may have to recognize divergent philosophical interpretations of theology and accept them accordingly. That is not to say, however, I must embrace all of them equally. To date, I have come to understand that I live as a co-creator, not just as a creature, within the felt presence of God. And through my co-creator activity I recognize that my self-fulfillment is intrinsically related to my self-realization. As a religious person my self-fulfillment and self-realization are no longer satisfied through an idealistic understanding of divinity. What I make myself to be, my self-realization in other words, discloses my unique status within the present presence of God, thereby constituting my self-fulfillment.

My self-realization, or “making myself to be” is philosophically reminiscent of Immanuel Kant’s perspective. I know that I exist, since I cannot consciously negate myself within the presence of God, “which one must always represent to oneself *only* as the effect of a force of which we do not have the subject” (my italics).<sup>30</sup> However, readers of these essays will recognize that, unlike Kant, I do not understand God as a “force,” but as a “present presence.” Given this perspective, there are significant positive implications for individuals who attempt to think philosophically (and theologically) in a new key.

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<sup>29</sup> *Eastern Philosophy* (Teach Yourself Books) Hodder & Stoughton (2000:2).

<sup>30</sup> *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be Able to Present Itself as a Science* (1959:98) Manchester University Press.



## 7. A FICTITIOUS INTERVIEW WITH DR LESLIE DEWART <sup>31</sup>

### *Prefatory note*

In 1966 Leslie Dewart published a book entitled, *The Future of Belief, Theism in a World Come of Age* containing philosophical ideas sufficiently revolutionary as to attract the attention of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. <sup>32</sup> That book has had a great influence on my thinking. Therefore, with the intent of following-up on an idea to write about philosophy and the environment I have crafted this imaginary interview with Leslie Dewart. My questions have been artificially crafted to match his “answers” as they appeared in the text of *The Future of Belief*. Naturally there is more to Dewart’s philosophy than has been addressed by me here. For a full appreciation of Dewart’s philosophy and development of his ideas the reader will need to refer to the range of Dewart’s works. This fictitious interview serves the purpose of providing the philosophical background to the notion of “dehellenization” that is at the root of my arguments in this book.

### 7.1 CHRISTIAN THEISM AND CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE

*Savage: The title of our first session, which sets the theme for all subsequent interviews is: “Christian Theism and Contemporary Experience,” following your own mind. I have some questions that I hope will disclose your thoughts and perspectives on theistic belief. Of course, we will limit our conversation to the contemporary understanding of the experience of those of us living in a Western Christian culture. What is the main problem, as you see it?*

Dewart: We perceive that there is a certain incongruity between Christianity and the contemporary world, but we frequently mis-conceptualize the precise nature of this lack of rapport.

*Given your notion of this “misconception,” my first question is: since Christians preach the Word of God as revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and there are many hard sayings in his message which seem to discourage acceptance of it, does this account for that lack of rapport from your perspective?*

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<sup>31</sup> This preamble is based upon content edited from *The Future of Belief*.

<sup>32</sup> As noted in *Contemporary Authors*, no condemnation was issued, but the Congregation asked Dewart not to authorize further editions of the book. He declined stating that “to have struck any such defensive posture would have implicitly granted the legitimacy of the Congregation as a tribunal at whose bar transgressions of the bounds of legitimate speculation may be tried.”



It is hardly an essentially proselytic or pastoral matter, least of all a problem in public relations. In its ultimate import the problem does involve the self-communicating nature, eschatological aspirations and the missionary objectives of a faith which not unfittingly calls itself Universalism. But to suppose that the question of integrating Christian theism with contemporary experience is one of message-communication, how to convey the meaning of Christianity to a world whose ordinary human life renders it refractory to conversion, this would not only miss the real difficulty but would also include several assumptions contrary to fact.

*Can you give me an example of an assumption contrary to fact?*

It is not certain, for instance, that the mission of the Church can be properly described in terms of conveying an idea to those outside it. Christianity has a mission, not a message. The Gospel is not the textbook of the Christian faith. As news it is the report of an event that happens. But what it communicates is its reality and existence, not an idea.

*When I hear you say "reality and existence" I think of the contributions of science to contemporary culture. Yet religion and science seem to be in conflict. Could science ultimately be mistaken?*

It is not readily apparent that science, however proud and rebellious, is a radically mistaken mode of perception of the reality of man and world. Contemporary experience should not be identified with the non-Christian, non-believing experience of those who are outside the Church, implying the assumption that the disintegration of contemporary experience and Christian faith is, up to a point, the normal and natural state of affairs. What we really mean if we thus construe the project of integrating Christian belief and the everyday world, is that we hope that non-believing modern man will eventually cease experiencing himself and reality as he does, and that he will replace his contemporary experience with Christian belief.

*As I understand G. Lowes Dickinson, the separation of belief and the experiences of the everyday world actually began in ancient Greece. The pagan philosophers Anaxagoras*

*and Socrates were indicted as atheists in their day.<sup>33</sup> Concerning the non-believing modern man, you say, “cease experiencing himself and reality as he does.” What is the alternative you have in mind to man’s present non-believing mode of experiencing himself?*

Contemporary experience should rather be understood as the mode of consciousness which mankind, has reached as a result of its historical and evolutionary development. To suppose that mankind could voluntarily renounce its history, its normal development and its growth in self- and world-understanding would show an unrealistic and misguided lack of appreciation of the nature of man, if not also of that of the Christian faith.

*I am sure we will probe into the understanding of the nature of humanity and the nature of the faith as we plod through with our interviews. From my research, experience is a key concept in your understanding. Are you thinking only of the Catholic tradition in the integration of the faith and experience?*

The project of integrating faith and experience is at least as relevant to the contemporary experience of Christians as to the experience of non-believers. In fact, if the solution to the problem should turn out to be useful towards the fulfillment of the missionary eschatological goals of the Catholic faith, the contemporary experience of Christian man automatically would integrate Christianity, at least in principle, with the experience of any contemporary man. Proselytic endeavors must be subordinated to the wider, theoretical question of the integration of Christian belief with the contemporary state of human development.

*But Catholics have the truth, do they not? Yet, the present state of human development seems to be leading away from this Christian understanding, no?*

Regardless of what we may feel, we all observe that the fairly total and serene self-assurance which had long characterized the consciousness of the Catholic believer, has been shaken in recent years. We note that there is unrest, unease and a frequently undefinable dissatisfaction, among the faithful and the clergy. And though bishops do not often disclose to the Church as a whole what their everyday consciousness reveals,

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<sup>33</sup> Dickinson, G Lowes (1932:56) *The Greek View of Life* Methuen.

there are indirect signs that they too, though perhaps in a different way and for different reasons, experience uncertainties, limitations and inadequacies to a degree which they are not by tradition accustomed to suffer.

*Are you saying that the clergy experience the Church in one way and the laity experience it in another? If so, is there no unity of mind among clergy and people regarding development of the faith?*

Catholic opinion is polarized into those who are exhilarated by the prospect of change and those who are fearful of it. That is, into those for whom it is a primary concern that the faith of the people should not be “disturbed” and those who argue that the welfare of the Church, if not the conversion of the world, requires radical innovations and possibly dramatic readjustments. To be sure, no given position on any given subject marks anyone with one type of mentality or with another. It does not necessarily reveal one sort of attitude or the other but that if one faces each issue with an independent enquiring mind, with intellectual autonomy and honesty, and on the matter’s own merits, a proper and legitimate random divergence of conclusions is likely to emerge. Whatever the reason, it is possible to estimate, not only that beyond liberal and conservative positions there are liberal and conservative attitudes, but also that these alternative modes of thinking correlate highly with a Catholic’s degree of acquaintance with, participation in, and acceptance of, the contemporary modality of human experience. For these two ways of thinking manifest fundamental differences in one’s most basic orientation towards the problem of the relation of the Catholic faith to the contemporary and, indeed, to any given stage of human development.

*So, you are suggesting that an independent enquiring mind leads to a plurality of ideas as one stage in evolutionary development. This plurality of ideas is expressed as liberal or conservative, and is embedded in Catholic teaching, yet transcends it. That being the case, how do these contrasting attitudes affect our understanding of God?*

We have to do here with divergent orientations towards the meaning of the Christian faith, towards the meaning of religion itself, and therefore towards the Catholic’s very understanding of his self-disposition towards God. Ultimately, we may have to do with

divergent conceptualizations of the God of Christian belief. They would be mistaken who thought that the post-Vatican II critical period of the Catholic Church, hardly more than the first episode of which, probably, is behind us and can be accounted for in terms of what Pope John and the Council wrought, or loosed upon the Church, depending on one's viewpoint. What we are witnessing today might be more accurately envisaged as a resolution of the very problem of which the Reformation was an unfortunately abortive issue, namely, the integration of Christian belief with the post-medieval stage of human development.<sup>34</sup>

*We live in a scientific age which is characteristic of the post-medieval stage of human development. Do you see any particular difficulties between science and religion traceable to the apparent tension between the two?*

The contemporary experience includes respect for science, largely because of science's diffidence and its readiness to change its mind, whereas contemporary man's enthusiasm for self-assurance of much Catholic philosophical thinking is under much stricter control. But if the problem is not, on the one hand, the incorporation into belief of the trappings of modern civilization, neither is it, on the other, the integration of Christian belief with that specialized function of modern life which we call science. It would make no sense to condition Christian belief upon the findings of science. It is not science, an extra- or super-human reality, that creates modern man. On the contrary, it is modern man that creates science. To be precise, modern man creates himself by means of science, that is, by means of his scientific mode of consciousness, that it is scientific culture that defines contemporary man. What counts is the human reality, the human experience and self-understanding, which produce the scientific method and scientific world-views, an experience and self-understanding which are then reciprocally molded by man's own scientific and other cultural creations, even if only a fraction of the population has more than an elementary acquaintance with science. It is not on science as such, but on the

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<sup>34</sup> Adolfs, Robert (1966:9) *The Grave of God: Has the Church a Future?* wrote: "Essentially, the Council was little more than a professional discussion between administrators of the Church, but popular imagination turned it into a spiritual rebirth of the Church. History, however, has shown that spiritual rebirths simply do not take place at Councils."

contemporary cultural stage of human self-consciousness, typically manifested in and conditioned by science and technology, that the traditional Christian faith grates.

*So, the problem is not between the methods of science and the interpretative philosophy of religion as being in conflict. It is more proper to locate the conflict in the human person at a particular stage of conscious experience. However, is not secularism the true "locus" of the problem?*

We might mistake it for the problem of the Church and the modern world, meaning the problem of reconciling the holy and the secular enterprises of man. That is, God's religion and man's political organization, man's social life, man's economic existence, man's technological world. The objection to this is not only that the opposition between theistic faith and everyday experience is not an opposition between the human and the divine, but also that the outward novelties and the secular changes that make up the contemporary world are but manifestations of a profound change in the mode and nature of human experience.

*Unless I am mistaken, Dickinson, in his perspective of ancient Greek life also saw a change in the nature and mode of human experience. I quote. "The quarrel of the philosopher with the myths is not that they are not true, but that they are not edifying. Clearly, concludes the philosopher, our current legends need revision; in the interest of religion itself we must destroy the myths of the popular creed." <sup>35</sup> Are the changes in the manner and experience of these "outward novelties," as you call them, not sufficient for the individual believer to continue to believe in God? Must the creed be destroyed in favour of an edifying scientific attitude?*

The deeper question concerns an issue at once more fundamental and more comprehensive, namely, the meaningfulness of Christian belief for the experience and self-understanding of man in a modern, industrial, technological society. For the experience and the self-concept of modern man do not merely fail to accord with institutional Christianity, they appear to conflict with Christianity's most basic doctrines and, in the first place, with belief in God.

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<sup>35</sup> Dickinson op. cit. (1932:50/51).

*Is to live in accord with institutional Christianity and to believe in God, not a moral requirement for Catholics? In other words, "extra ecclesiam, nulla salus" that is, no salvation outside the church.*

The far greater majority of men in the West have opted for the rejection (also, to be sure, in varying degrees) of the realism, if not also the moral validity, of institutional religion. Retaining an integrally contemporary experience, they have fashioned for themselves (if they have not drifted into religious indifference or discovered the religions of atheism) a vague religious sentiment more or less distantly affiliated to the traditional Christian belief to which, from the point of view of the history of culture, they continue to belong.

*Does this "vague religious sentiment" you identify replace the traditional notion of theism as the new belief in God?*

The trouble with religious theism is that, having once had an important, in fact, necessary role in human development, and having once usefully served man as a means of coping with utterly real perplexities, it has perpetuated itself beyond his needs. With increased self-consciousness and increased mastery of the world, religious theism, to be sure, is highly imperfect. Man can devise more adequate means than religion to grapple with the same problems. Science is, of course, the principal, though by no means the only, such means.

*So, what is believed in by contemporary humanity may differ from traditional belief in God by the Church proper. Yet, humanity's beliefs have been the necessary products of human development. This leads me to shift the focus of religious belief to that of religious illusion. Since Freud's "Future of an Illusion," which appeared in 1927, do you see a bright future for religious belief in God? And, if so, do you see Freud's contribution to philosophy in this area as truly significant?*

In common with every other scientific humanist, Freud hoped that mankind might one day rise above this view of life. He looked forward to the future when mature man should find it possible to do without the consolation of the religious illusion in order to endure the troubles of life, the cruelty of reality. For, in his argument Freud retained certain questionable presuppositions which do not invalidate his argument altogether, but which once exorcised require one to transpose his conclusions into a key that does not readily

harmonize with scientific humanism. To believe, for example, that the scientific *Weltanschauung* <sup>36</sup> required the confession that man is no longer the centre of creation, was to assume a relatively primitive and gross, indeed an inadequate and quasi-geometrical, criterion of the centrality of man's position in the universe. With the greater self-confidence provided by his superior cultural equipment, Freud went beyond primitive man in proposing that fear should be overcome. But he did not appear to doubt that reality is truly frightening. He shared the primitive view that the apprehension of reality should normally elicit concern for one's safety. Like primitive man, according to Freud, contemporary man is bound by the nature of reality to experience helplessness when faced with the cruelty of the world. He proposed that modern man should react differently to what he assumed to be the same situation in which both primitive and contemporary man find themselves by nature. And yet, it may be that the possibilities open to man are much wider than Freud suspected. It may be that man's reaction should be different, but only because his situation is not the same. For it may be that to a mankind come of age the world should no longer appear hostile, but simply stimulating and challenging. The insecurity which Freud took to be natural to man may well be proper to only a passing stage of human evolution. Man may not be naturally alienated.

*I find it interesting that in the opening chapter of his book Dickinson remarks from a philosophical, not psychological point of view: "Man, in short, by his religion has been made at home in the world and that is the first point to seize upon." <sup>37</sup> Thus, the cosmos is something familiar to man. But remaining within a psychological perspective, my past, present and future, as I understand them, form a continuum that, so far, confirms Freud's view of alienation. I look to correct in the present moment my mistakes of the past in order to be happy in the future. Theologically, in other words, I seek to have my sins forgiven.*

There is indeed much evidence for the view that when Freud wrote that the intention that man should be happy is not included in the scheme of Creation, he did not merely mean that man is not assured of self-fulfillment and perfection by nature but must instead creatively fulfill himself. He seems, rather, to have been harking back to a dominant theme of Greek philosophy, to which he owed so much in so many other respects, that

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<sup>36</sup> A particular philosophy or view of life; the world view of an individual or group.

<sup>37</sup> Dickinson op. cit. (1932:4)

man, against whom, as Hippocrates said, “all things conspire,” is destined by fatal cosmic forces to suffer tragic distress.

*From a philosophical point of view, I tend to agree with Hippocrates. My experience is that the world is often against me and that life is a burden. I hope for a better life in heaven. Do you not find this to be a legitimate aspiration?*

It is not out of the question to doubt that the large legacy of pessimism we have inherited from Greece must be an essential part of human nature. If reality is experienced as reality, if the world is envisaged as man's home, and if the purposiveness of conscious existence is conceived as being and not as being happy, the future forecast by Freud for the religious illusion might well come true, but in the form of a further development of Christian theism, not in that of its disappearance. Freud's thesis cannot be invoked in order to do away with the legitimacy of religious preoccupation. In the end it is the pastor who has to dissolve the inconsistencies and liquidate the mystifications of theologians and philosophers. The Catholic clergy have generally attempted but to convey to the faithful, as best they could, the mind of the Church.

*It seems to me that your comment about a change of form for Christian theism as an outcome of Freud's contribution, which has been prefigured by Dickinson, is similar to the pastor's work in relation to the scientific attitude. Let me quote a short paragraph from Dickinson. "The beauty, singleness, and the freedom which attracts us in the consciousness of the Greek was the poetical view of the world, which did but anticipate in imagination an ideal that was not realized in fact or in thought. It depended on the assumption of anthropomorphic gods, an assumption which could not stand before the criticism of reason, and either broke down into skepticism, or was developed into the conception of a single supreme and spiritual power." <sup>38</sup> In light of Dickinson's remark, do you think that the faithful need pastor-philosophers to interpret "the mind of the Church" for them, lest they fall into Freud's view?*

The difficulty is that ever since Christian morality began to be conceptualized, to use St. Thomas's own language, in terms of the performance of certain acts which constituted the means whereby happiness is to be gained, in other words, ever since it began to be

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<sup>38</sup> Dickinson op. cit. (1932:67).



cast in the hellenic concepts of means to the attainment of a final end, it has been difficult to preach Christianity without fostering the illusion described by Freud.

*Again, if I may reference Dickinson, the ancient Greek "lived and acted undisturbed by scrupulous introspection; and the function of his religion was rather to quiet the conscience by ritual than to excite it by admonition and reproof." <sup>39</sup> But in our psychologically dominated age how do we overcome Freud's illusion, and the need for "admonition and reproof?" Is anyone to blame for it?*

Not even Freud sought to blame anyone for the religious illusion. But we might go beyond Freud and insist that it was not only healthy, but also proper and good, under concrete historical and cultural conditions for Christian theism to have taken the illusory forms it has. No one need, or indeed should, regret having lived a younger life, no one need be ashamed if when he was a child he spoke as a child. But, if not with Freud, then with another Jew whom Freud admired [Ernest Jones] we might agree that once we admit to ourselves that we are no longer children, the time has come to put away the things of a child.

*Moving beyond Freud, do you have any thoughts about contemporary theology, one that is freed from the limitations and isolation of the seminary curriculum and the concept of God? <sup>40</sup>*

The direct treatment of the problem of everyday experience and Christian belief in God has been relatively neglected, even if it is amply recognized that we unquestionably do need a re-statement of what God is all about. The time has come for Christian thought to apply itself, within its more general plan to integrate experience and faith, to the problem of the concept of God. The problem of integrating theism and modern life requires, therefore, a theoretical justification, in the light of a commitment to the truth of Christianity, of the attempt to integrate it with contemporary experience, in other words, a theory of dogmatic development.

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<sup>39</sup> Dickinson op. cit. (1932:66).

<sup>40</sup> [Cf. Adolfs (1966:138)] "One very important task of the clergy in the future will therefore be to make the laity conscious of its call to service as the People of God within the structures of secular society. ... We shall indeed see a completely different form of theology arise when the teaching of theology is freed from the limitations and the isolation of the environment of the seminary."

*The suggestion of a theory of dogmatic development seems to me to advocate exploring new ground in light of the traditional teaching on the concept of dogma. Yet, the dogmas of the church concerning God's transcendent reality as revealed truth do not change, as I understand it.*

However ultimate and transcendent God's reality, if he is a reality, must be conceived as being. And insofar as God's principal and original relation to man is that of creator to creature, God must be conceived as the being who is the cause of being. The idea is that reality as such is properly, necessarily and exclusively conceivable as being, or otherwise not at all. The suggestion that the integration of Christian belief and contemporary experience, especially in what concerns the concept of God, could not be successfully attempted by a Christian theology, should be put positively. The integration of faith and experience might be successfully undertaken, particularly with regard to the central dogmatic theism of the Catholic faith, in the light of philosophical principles which in their totality corresponded to the contemporary level of human self-consciousness. It must radically depart from the philosophic world-viewing which has given the traditional Christian faith in God a cultural form which no longer serves well that Christian faith. My suggestion is that it is precisely at this level that a Christian philosophy could usefully intervene in Christian theological speculation.

*Regarding contemporary scientific speculation, the work of Teilhard de Chardin comes to mind, especially his "Divine Milieu" and "Phenomenon of Man." Both books attempt to integrate evolutionary, or scientific thought with theology. Any comments on Teilhard's approach?*

Teilhard's thought was not an apologetic endeavor to harmonize science and the traditional conceptualizations of the Christian faith. It was a creative attempt to follow through to its ultimate consequences a scientific and fully contemporary experience in the light of a Christian faith which, on the one hand, functioned to make that scientific experience religiously meaningful, but which, on the other, required re-interpretation and reconceptualization in the categories of contemporary experience for the very sake of illuminating that everyday scientific experience.

*As I understand Teilhard, evolution has an end point, a final goal. Do you agree?*

There are several passages in Teilhard that only with great difficulty, if at all, could escape the objection that in his doctrine the evolutionary processes lead necessarily and inevitably to a final, that is, Omega point of history. For Teilhard occasionally equated intelligibility and necessity, and a Christian can do so only as long as he does not believe in evolution. Teilhard was needlessly betrayed by an uncharacteristic reversion to a hellenic idea that development must be reducible to becoming, therefore, in things which develop the actual is intelligible only in relation to the possible. If so, there is at bottom *nihil novum sub sole*.<sup>41</sup> That which results from evolution must be found in potency in that from which it evolves. More precisely, in this philosophical tradition potency is essentially relative to act and is for the sake of act, *potentia dicitur ad actum*. Potency is, therefore, intelligible in relation to act.<sup>42</sup> Though this aspect of Teilhard's thought is probably not central or decisive or definitive part of the spirit of his doctrine, there can be little doubt that Teilhardism is philosophically weak. But this does not mean it should be rejected. It means that the present moment of the history of the Church offers to the Catholic intellect the task of providing a rigorous philosophical foundation for such Christian visions as that which was inspired in Teilhard de Chardin by scientific experience.

*Teilhardism is philosophically weak you say. Is such a philosophical weakness evident throughout contemporary Catholic theology?*

Perhaps the same point should be made rather more generally, in terms of certain significant differences, surely not surprising, between the typical difficulties with Catholic and Protestant attempts, respectively, to integrate theology and exegesis with contemporary experience. The differences are, as it so happens, related to their typically divergent traditional attitudes towards philosophy. Speaking very generally, it can be said that Protestant thought is not well disposed towards philosophy. The traditional Protestant tendency to rely on Scripture alone predisposes it towards this attitude, which

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<sup>41</sup> Translation: nothing new under the sun.

<sup>42</sup> The full philosophical axiom is: *Potentia dicitur ad actum et specificatur ab objecto*. Translation: There is no third way, there can be no middle between being and non-being.

is confirmed by its original aversion to Scholastic rationalism. Catholic thought, on the other hand, has always recognized amply the indispensable role of philosophy in theological speculation. But in this context philosophy has to date continued to mean predominantly an obsolete mode of thought. Radical Protestant theology has been characterized by a variation of the same idea of dogmatic theology. It has tended to become the understanding of Scripture in the light of contemporary knowledge, and in particular science, history or modern philosophy. Understanding the New Testament as a document which under rigorous scientific examination can reveal its original cultural and historical meaning, has led us to a deeper appreciation of the total humanity of Jesus and to an eye-opening assessment of the cultural and historical origins of the Christian faith.

*This is true in the West, I believe, but, something similar has occurred in the East regarding Orthodox theology. It has traditionally developed without a classical philosophical support structure. But, further discussion on this would take us away from our present concern. So, to stay on topic the question is: given the “deeper appreciation of the total humanity of Jesus” arising from Protestant scientific examination, in light of Catholic philosophical interpretation where do you see the weakness?*

The contemporary philosophical understanding of human nature could in turn help much, but if, at the same time, in the absence of ready-made concepts of God which can be plundered from the classical sources of phenomenology and existentialism, God remains understood in the traditional way “of all centuries,” say, as the Supreme Being, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is apt to become, if not totally impossible, so obscure as to be next to meaningless. In this approach, the integration of experience and faith has sometimes meant only the rhetorical and figurative re-interpretation of the traditional doctrine.

*It seems to me that a rhetorical and figurative re-interpretation might return us to Freud’s perspective. To advance beyond his perspective, is not more required of the Christian philosophical understanding of God?*

More concretely, I suggest that the integration of theism with today's everyday experience requires not merely the demythologization of Scripture but the more comprehensive dehellenization of dogma, and specifically that of the Christian doctrine of God. Of course, this task is of such magnitude that I wish to reiterate what I mentioned earlier I am merely sketching the proposal in broad outline in order to try it on the touchstone of public examination. Dehellenization is the negative way of expressing this idea. It is the logical term to use for it if, astride the present, *before* we proceed forward, we take stock of where we have come from and where we have been. But we look to our hellenic past in order to transcend the ambivalent present. This transcending of the present is dehellenization insofar as the present is out-of-the-past. For this reason, it is more difficult to find the logical name for that which dehellenization *positively* seeks to bring about.

*From a philosophical perspective it appears the you are attempting to turn a negative term into a positive one to describe the future understanding of dehellenized Christian belief.*

It is difficult to know what the future might look like as a result of the transcendence of the present, and as long as dehellenization is a project of the present, the future has not yet come about. On the day when we can call dehellenization by its correct present designation, as having transcended the past, the problem will be how to transcend it, whatever it might be called. Nonetheless, on the basis, not of what it might positively look like in the future, but of what its positive function at present already suggests, dehellenization may well be described, without a negative reference to the past, as the conscious historical self-fashioning of the cultural form which Christianity requires now for the sake of its future. In other words, dehellenization means, in positive terms, the conscious creation of the future of belief.

*So, do we create a new image of God, then? A new theism, as it were?*

Theism in a world come of age must itself be a theism come of age. There is, of course, nothing unusual, mistaken or shameful in the implication that theistic belief should have

once been infantile. There might well be, however, something unreasoning, to say the least, in a theistic belief that willfully and consciously chose to remain forever out of phase with the maturity of human experience at any given stage.

*In our present Western Christian culture, many people do not believe in God. For those who do, what do you think is the greatest paradox concerning their belief in God?*

Does not the very existence of atheism in the midst of a culture which is historically theistic, a culture which, despite its apostasy remains culturally and anthropologically describable in no other terms than Western Christendom, tell us something about the nature of Christian theism? Had modern atheism been imported from abroad the case might be different. But it happens to be a historical fact that our atheism is indigenous. We devised it ourselves, strictly out of our own cultural resources. Evidently, modern atheism is the atheism of the Christian world.

*Are you able to account for this “atheism in the Christian world?” If so, where do you begin?*

We should begin with a commonly accepted distinction, first made by Henri de Lubac and subsequently widely reproduced, between atheism, in the strict sense of the word, and antitheism, or, more precisely, antichristianism. The denial of the existence of God as an actuality requires the admission of the existence of God as at least a logical possibility, not necessarily, of course, as a real one. For the anti-theist God is, if nothing else, thinkable. For the a-theist he is not. It is a negative existential judgment concerning an object of thought, God, who is, therefore, at least by implication, allowed the status of a logically possible, conceivable reality. This is important, because from its negative character it follows that atheism as such is not actually the absolutely first metaphysical principle. As a negation of a certain existence it rests upon a prior affirmation of another existence. This other existence is not far to seek. It is the existence of man. The denial of God is the logical consequence of the affirmation of man. The existence of man is held to be scientifically, psychologically, logically, physically, metaphysically and, above all, morally undeniable.

*If I follow through on your thought and affirm my humanity then, does that mean I eventually will come not to believe in God? That I will no longer need religion?*

In finding either the absence or the presence of God we have to do with a fundamental mode of self- and world-consciousness which is concretized in a radical resolve, that is, in a commitment of oneself, to a certain projected existence. One has to decide both whether to believe and whether to dis-believe. By religion I mean here a mere phenomenological and cultural fact, namely, some sort of fundamental attitude towards totality and resolve towards existence, regardless of the specific content of that attitude. For, as Michael Novak notes, the decision to believe, made with authenticity, appears to have roots other than emotional weakness or monistic prepossessions. The decision to believe springs from a decision about what in human experience is to be taken as the criterion of the real. As each man is, so will he decide what is most real in human experience. According to that decision, he will shape his own identity. But, of course, the same is true of the decision to dis-believe, because, again from Novak's perspective, the serious nonbeliever and the serious believer share a hidden unity of spirit.

*So, both the believer and non-believer are religious, each in his or her own way.*

When both do all they can to be faithful to their understanding and to love, and to the immediate task of diminishing the amount of suffering in the world, the intention of their lives is similar, even though their conceptions of what they are doing are different. Christian belief in God is nevertheless an act of existential self-relation to ultimate reality. We have to do with the order of ultimate self-commitment, ultimate self-disposition towards reality. In either case we have to do with faith. For although the inexistence, just like the existence, of God may well be reasonable, the inexistence, just like the existence, of God is inevident. From this antithesis we may draw, not the skeptical conclusion that no one can decide whether to believe, or dis-believe, that God exists, but we may observe the verifiable fact that no one, unless he deceives himself, can find "reasonable proofs" remotely sufficient to necessitate a personal commitment to existence.

*Are you saying that although reason cannot prove God's existence, I must have faith that God exists?*

I interpret the teaching of Vatican I concerning the demonstrability of God's existence as relative to its preoccupation with fideism. Even among Thomists very few have drawn the idea that in point of fact any demonstration can actually replace the Christian's act of faith in God, though some have actually drawn it. Faith is a commitment of one's existential self in the light of a certain apprehension of reality as disclosed in lived experience. For faith is always coming-into-being, it is never quite fully faithful, it is always on the way, hence never perfect and achieved. And if faith is a mode of existence then Christian theism is a way of life.

*How do you understand faith?*

Faith is the existential response of the self to the openness of the transcendence disclosed by conscious experience. It is our decision to respect, to let be, the contingency of our being, and, therefore, to admit into our calculations a reality beyond the totality of being. For the reality of Christian belief is distorted if we understand the "act" of faith as a discrete operation. It is no less a coming-into-being than the act of existence which is, likewise, a perpetual achieving of the unachieved. In real life we find not the act, but the life of faith. We cannot believe in God once-for-all any more than we can exist once-for-all. To the degree that we cease believing and presume to rest on our belief we are likely to become unfaithful to our faith. We are apt to arrest the development of our religious life.

*Does such arrested development of the religious life imply idolatry?*

The Christian faith must be, under pain of idolatry, painstakingly self-critical. The Christian tradition, which God we believe in is of the utmost importance and the Christian faith requires us, under pain of infidelity, to profess atheism in relation to every false God. This means that the Christian faith is both belief and dis-belief. It requires conscious separation of that in which we must, from that in which we must not, believe.



*In light of the foregoing it appears that I cannot rely on a scholastic understanding of the faith to help me decide what not to believe.*

The Scholastic distinction between supernatural and natural faith is not highly relevant to contemporary life. But despite its faulty conceptualization, which weds it to an antiquated philosophy of man, it corresponds to a vital reality of Christian life, namely, that the Christian belief in God is quite unlike faith in anything or anyone else. This is manifested in the fact that belief in God does not settle anything about human life. In fact, to the degree that it rules one's life faith is, if anything, unsettling.

*I can appreciate that belief in God is unsettling. But, is it not the case that an unsettling life may prompt me to avoid or even deny God's reality?*

Christianity enjoys the doubtful distinction of being the only higher religion to have become preoccupied with the existence of God to the extent of having neglected his reality. That it so neglected it is the true meaning of the defection of the working class, the secularization of the culture and the apostasy of science, and it is evident from the history of the Church's attitude to social, political and scientific questions. Christianity indeed is the only religion to have generated religious atheism within itself. A genuine and lived concern with truth means a hypothetical willingness to disbelieve should the truth require one to do so. And yet, the Christian, evidently, must not so dishonestly or pragmatically believe that he would stand ready to continue believing even if he should no longer experience his belief as true.

*When you describe the situation this way I am reminded of the phrase, "my country; right or wrong — and don't try to change my mind."*

Could the believer wish that if his belief were false he should never find out? This would be believing for the sake of believing or for the sake of whatever consequences, other than truth-belief may bring. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, on the contrary, the steady purification of the concept of God has increasingly facilitated the emergence of that peculiar disbelief which, being born of the same religious experience as belief, can fairly be called, in contradistinction to the atheism born of inconsiderateness, un-reflectiveness,

inexperience, or sheer obstinacy in refusing to admit the possibility of God, religious atheism. From the relative nature of Christian theism follows its aptitude for development, readjustment and cultural polymorphism. It is not given once for all. It is, therefore, dynamic, evolving and self-transforming. But how could Christian theism be all these things and nevertheless true? That is, how could it be these things and yet remain, both originally and ever, a true doctrine of the Christian faith? The answer depends on whether a theory of the development of Christian doctrine could reconcile these apparently contradictory, mutually exclusive qualities of Christian belief.

*We will pursue your thoughts of the development of Christian doctrine in our next segment.*

## 7.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEIEM

*I would like us now to turn our attention, in this segment, to the development of Christian dogma that you introduced in the previous discussion. Is there a documented history to the development of dogma in the Church?*

It is interesting to note that Catholic theology has only gradually become aware of the fact that dogma develops. St. Thomas was aware that the articles of faith have increased in the course of time. But this hardly constituted a true development of what is believed. The sense is, however, that the dogma itself does not in any real sense change, although its articulation becomes more complex. When Bossuet <sup>43</sup> in the seventeenth century contrasted the immutability of Catholic doctrine with Protestant variability, he may have been emphasizing an aspect of the Thomistic doctrine in which St. Thomas took little interest, but he was hardly departing from the common position of mediaeval theology.

*Medieval theology notwithstanding, what is the situation today?*

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<sup>43</sup> Court preacher to Louis XIV of France, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704) was a strong advocate of political absolutism and the divine right of kings. He argued that government was divine and that kings received their power from God.

The gradual conviction has arisen that Christian dogma must be said in some real sense to develop and, indeed, to have been developing since earliest time. I underscore this: the fact of which we have recently become aware is not that Christian doctrine has begun to develop in recent times, but that it has always existed in a process of development. It is only the awareness of this fact that is new.

*Is Christianity the only religion to experience this “Johnny come lately” awareness of its historical development?*

The post-facto awareness of one’s development is not peculiar to Christianity. It is a property of human nature. It can be no coincidence that Christianity reached this awareness concerning itself at the same time that mankind reached the same awareness of its own historicity and its evolutionary nature in every other respect. As man has become historically minded, man has found the understanding of his past history indispensable for the understanding of his present reality and for the adequacy of his self-projection into the future. Religious experience follows the same rules as all human experience. Christianity’s awareness of the fact that it develops historically must in some sense find its explanation in the nature of human consciousness.

*To me consciousness is a psychological term. But you seem to be using it philosophically.*

Indeed, consciousness is understood as the typical and proper form of human psychism, of human existence and life. But in the understanding of recent philosophical thought, man’s psychic life, however, exhibits a peculiar character which animals do not appear even in part to share. For man is the being who is present to himself. This presence of his being present to himself is called consciousness. Both man and animal *know*. The difference transcends the order of mere knowledge altogether.

*When Socrates said, “know thyself,” could he have meant to be conscious of yourself? In other words, can consciousness be equated with knowledge, or are they different?*

The typical form of human development can only be an increase in consciousness. Its distinctiveness over learning properly so called is that it cannot take the form of a quantitative increase. Man can develop in this way, that is, he can learn, since he can know, in the sense that consciousness virtually contains knowledge. But this is not what defines his human development. The heightening of consciousness presupposes a genuine but more primitive consciousness. Present consciousness can only grow out of it, and it is meaningful only in relation to it. The understanding of man's psychic life in terms of consciousness, rather than knowledge, creates the possibility of understanding the truth of the Christian faith in such a way as would not only permit true development to occur, but indeed as requiring it by its very nature as truth. Insofar as it pertains to mutable things, truth requires constancy of proportion rather than strict immutability.

*“Constancy of proportion” to use your words, applied to truth suggests to me that the truth is relative and changes according to circumstances. In short, what may be true for me may not be true for you. I was taught, in the scholastic tradition, that truth being eternal does not change.*

The scholastic tradition may well be one source of the fairly common assumption that the notion of Christian truth as eternal and immutable is an integral part of the Christian faith. But this scarcely compels one to conclude that to diverge from the Scholastic conception of truth is to diverge from the truth of faith. Since there is, so far as I understand the matter, no revealed Christian theory of truth, any theory of truth used or assumed by Christian teaching or speculation must run the same risks and be subject to the same development as, say, a cosmological or anthropological theory used or assumed by them.

*Are you suggesting the possibility of new truths arising in the faith from philosophical development?*

In the absence of new revelation after the close of the New Testament era, the faith of Christianity cannot teach any new truths. In the past, of course, as God's revelation took place over a long period of time, new truths, the Trinity, the Incarnation, were revealed and taught, pre-eminently by Christianity in relation to Judaism. In this connection it

may be pertinent to recall that the Reformation's anti-Roman character was rendered possible by the Reformers' assumption of basically the same idea concerning the fixity of Christian doctrine. But assuming also the premise that the contemporary Church, under the Roman pontificate, had substantially changed the original sense, the Reformers had to conclude that Christianity had been corrupted, and that the Christian faith must regain its original primitive sense. It would be unfortunate if, as more and more Catholics find it impossible to reconcile the historicity of human nature with Proposition 62 of *Lamentabili*,<sup>44</sup> they should draw a conclusion paradoxically similar to that of the Reformers, and look backwards to the original purity of traditional Christianity instead of forward to the demands of the future.

*A moment ago, you spoke of the absence of new revelation after the close of the New Testament era. Can you elaborate a bit on this?*

I mean that revelation has not ended and indeed never shall as long as God continues to deal personally with man and be present to human history. For we should not suppose that the fullness of God's self-revelation in Jesus means that God's self-revelation ceased at a certain point in time, after which we no longer enjoy the revealing presence of God, but only the record of the revelation completed in the past. To think in new concepts is to develop one's original experience. On this basis it may be possible to suggest the outline of a theory of the mechanism of dogmatic development in which the very preservation of the original truth of Christianity would not merely permit, but actually require, the ceaseless re-conceptualization of Christian belief.

*How might a theory of "the mechanism of dogmatic development" be different from traditional concepts?*

Such a theory would rest on the distinction between the experience and the conceptualization of faith. The conceptualization of faith is a process by which we render

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<sup>44</sup> Proposition 62 condemned the belief that "the chief articles of the Apostles' Creed did not have the same sense for the Christians of the first ages as they have for the Christians of our time." The syllabus (1907) does not use the term *modernist*, but it was regarded as part of the campaign of Pope Pius X against Modernism in general, and philosophical evolution in particular.

ourselves present to that-in-which-we-believe. This does not mean that concepts perform the function of mediating the mind's assimilation of reality. The concepts which articulate and express the Christian faith do not render us present to that-in-which-we-believe by virtue of their alleged representational value. They are not similitudes of their object. Like all other concepts, the concepts of Christian belief are not true because of their effectiveness in representing objects. They are true because of their effectiveness in relating, by relation of truth, man's reality to the reality of that-in-which-he-believes. It would be better to say that the concept is true to the degree that by its elevation of experience to consciousness. It permits the truth of human experience to come into being.

*If I have understood you correctly, up to this point, concepts which have been re-interpreted in light of contemporary experience, developed a new purpose within and for consciousness; concepts are not simply a re-working of previous ideas.*

[The re-interpretation of ideas] can be properly called an evolution of concepts because the emergent form cannot be reduced to the act of the potentiality of the original form of the concept. And since the conceptual form of the experience of faith does not determine what is revealed, it also follows that the cultural transformation of the Christian faith and the development of its truth do not imply either the discovery of a new, different truth which it did not previously possess, or the betrayal of the truth that it previously possessed. What it does imply, however, is that truth is no longer the *adaequatio rei et intellectus*.<sup>45</sup> But truth remains, and this truth that remains is living and active. It is the *adaequatio mentis et vitae*.<sup>46</sup> The theory of development I sketch here attempts to account not only for the possible future development of dogma, although its most immediate practical usefulness, if valid, would be to render possible a consciously undertaken programme of doctrinal development.

*Are you thinking in the direction of the so-called theological modernists, Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell?*

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<sup>45</sup> Translation: correspondence of the thing and the intellect.

<sup>46</sup> Translation: correspondence of the mind and life.

The theory of doctrinal development I sketch here bears some real, but many superficial resemblances to the so-called Modernist theory. Therefore, I should point out certain essential differences between the two. The Modernist theory of development, at least as defined and condemned by *Pascendi*,<sup>47</sup> which is the only one that matters for present purposes, is in summary as follows. Since God does not reveal propositions or formulae about himself, he does not truly reveal himself except insofar as he implants in man an immanent religious sense or consciousness, and an impulse towards the divine. Christianity is a revealed religion only insofar as it is the evolutionary development of man's religious experience or consciousness, for the Modernists did not distinguish between the two. That is, Christianity is the development of the original principles immanent in human nature. Therefore, the Judaeo-Christian revelation is not essentially different from any other; it is much like that of any natural religion, except in that, having followed its own evolutionary line, it differs in specific content, in a great many dogmas, from other religions. Thus, the conceptualization of religious consciousness, religious sentiment, or religious experience has no other purpose than to furnish the believer with a means of giving to himself an account of his faith. Dogmas, therefore, are symbols which stand between the believer and his faith. They must evolve because they are in essence, and precisely as dogmatic symbols, inadequate. They were originally inadequate and shall always remain so. All this assumes, of course, that revelation was in no sense completed with the close of the apostolic age. Revelation is rather a perpetual unfolding of the religious sense immanent in man's nature.

*Given that dogmatic symbols are inadequate as you suggest, how then does what you understand differ from the Modernist position?*

The theory of development in accordance with the views I express here would contest each and every one of [*Pascendi's*] propositions. It would instead propose that although God does not reveal propositions or formulae or concepts about himself, he truly reveals himself. He does this not through a principle immanent in human nature. He does it personally, by his own agency, through his personal presence to human history, in which

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<sup>47</sup> *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907) issued by Pope Pius X condemned a range of principles which were meant to allow for change in Roman Catholic dogma.

he freely chooses to appear and take part. Although we cannot deny to God the possibility of acting in all human history and to reveal himself in other ways, his revelation to man in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is unique and extraordinary. The Christian religion and the Catholic Church are, in this extraordinary and unique sense, the true religion and the true Church to which all men are called. The conceptualization of religious experience of faith does not come between man and the object of faith. On the contrary, it enables the experience of faith to exist. Dogmatic formulae and concepts, therefore, do not mediate between faith and its object. They express faith in its object, God. Therefore, they evolve not because they are always and from the beginning necessarily inadequate, but because as man develops they become inadequate if they fail to evolve. They must, therefore, in a sense necessarily develop, since man himself must develop in order to exist.

*In light of man's development, then, is it then possible to think of revelation as closed as you noted earlier?*

Revelation was completed with the close of the apostolic age at least in the sense that, the Redemption having been accomplished as a concrete and discrete historical event, mankind ceased to exist in the preparatory period of *Heilsgeschichte* <sup>48</sup> and henceforth would exist in the final historical age of man in his relations with God, that is, in the new and eternal testament. But this does not mean that within the age of the Incarnation there can be no further development of mankind's faith-response to God's continuous self-revelation nor, therefore, in the dogmas that conceptualize and formulate that belief. Nor, incidentally, does it mean that there could not be a further stage of divine-human relations beyond the new and eternal testament of man's last historical age if, at the end of the world man should evolve altogether beyond humanity. On the contrary, as man, by his natural powers, develops and becomes more perfectly aware of himself and the world, it

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<sup>48</sup> *Heilsgeschichte*: an interpretation of history emphasizing God's saving acts and viewing Jesus Christ as central in redemption. Cf. Lauer, Quentin (1958:172, n.20) *Phenomenology: Its Genesis and Its Prospect* Harper & Row, where he distinguishes "*Geschichte* from *Historie*. The first is a traceable progressive development, whereas the second is but the record of this development."



is necessary that the conceptualization of his religious faith develop correspondingly in order to preserve if not also perfect his original faith in the self-same self-revealing God.

*Your explanation notwithstanding, I'll need some time to digest your overall distinctions between the Modernist perspective and your understanding of the development of dogma. However, can you cite a specific point distinguishing between the two?*

The fundamental mistake of the Modernists consisted in attempting to reinterpret the traditional doctrines of the development of dogma and of the nature of revelation in line with the contemporary awareness of human evolution and historicity, but on the continued assumption of the traditional theory of knowledge, in which a subject enters into union with an object to overcome an original isolation between the two. If so, the only alternative to the traditional idea that God's revelation was essentially and uniquely cast in the original concepts employed by Scripture, is the idea that it was cast in an immanent religious sentiment and inclination as part of the original constitution of human nature. In the theory I suggest here human knowledge is not the bridging of an original isolation but, on the contrary, the self-differentiation of consciousness in and through its objectification of the world and of itself and conceptualization is the socio-historical mechanism through which the self-differentiation of consciousness can take place. Concepts are not the subjective expression of an objective reality nor, therefore, a means whereby we become reflectively conscious of a self which already existed prior to reflection. Concepts are the self-expression of consciousness and, therefore, the means by which we objectify the world and the self, and the means whereby we self-communicate with another self, including God. In short, the means by which we objectify ourselves for another self is the means by which we objectify ourselves for ourselves.

*I am intrigued by your last sentence. Can you express it in a philosophical nutshell, as it were?*

Man's psychic life is not the mind's, unilateral and intentional, union with a reality from which it was originally separated by its substantive self-containment. On the contrary, it is the mind's self-differentiation of its-self out of a reality with which it was originally

continuous and united in un-differentiation. But since consciousness differentiates the self out of the totality of undifferentiated reality, the faithful, steadfast and continued development of the self can actually occur only to the degree that the world is objectified, that is, conceptualized, systematized, organized, lived with and made meaningful for our consciousness. The most basic doubt that cannot possibly be entertained, not merely in good logic, as with Descartes' impossibility of doubting that I think, but even in lived experience, is the doubt that I might be an-other. The fundamental empirical, and not merely logical, fact of philosophy is not *cogito*,<sup>49</sup> but *sum*.<sup>50</sup>

*To hear you say that reminds me of Ludwig Feuerbach's Proposition 55 which I understand to be a broader notion than Descartes' "cogito." I quote Feuerbach from 1843:*

Art, religion, philosophy, and science are only manifestations or revelations of the true human essence. Man, the complete and true man, is only he who possesses a sense that is esthetic or artistic, religious, or moral, philosophic or scientific; in general, only he who excludes from himself nothing, essentially human is man. "*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*"<sup>51</sup> — this sentence, taken in its most universal and highest meaning, is the motto of the new philosophy.

*And on that note, I must end this segment but I look forward in our next session and to your views on the relationship between philosophy and faith.*

### 7.3 THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEISM

*Now for this segment let us focus on the underdevelopment of Christian theism. When all is said and done how do you see philosophy's role as supporting the faith?*

The transcendence of God makes it necessary both to deny and to affirm. God is beyond existing and non-existing. I do not say that we have always found it possible to abide by this paradox, or to conceive superlative affirmations that were irreducible to simple

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<sup>49</sup> *cogito*: I think.

<sup>50</sup> *sum*: I am.

<sup>51</sup> English translation: 'I am a man, nothing that is human I consider foreign to me.'

theses. The point is that we cannot adequately believe in God unless these qualifications and this relative disbelief become integrating parts of our lived faith. Creative Catholic theology has therefore increasingly turned to non-Scholastic which means almost exclusively non-Catholic, indeed, non-Christian, philosophical thought. And a philosophy that had become so impotent that it needed upholding by faith should perhaps have been considered more of a hindrance than a help.

*But philosophy was seen in medieval times as a servant to theology, was it not?*

My remark applies not to mediaeval Scholasticism as such, but to its retention as the immutable form of Christian philosophy long after its time had passed. All I have taught about the positive benefits of Christianity's hellenization I believe to be applicable, with added emphasis, to its principal philosophical component, namely, medieval Scholasticism. But by the same token, the obsolescence of Scholasticism goes together with that of Christianity's hellenic cultural form. As human consciousness continued to develop beyond the middle ages, thanks indeed to its development during the Middle Ages, the usefulness of Scholasticism waned at the same time that its employment gradually became its adoption in the sixteenth century, then its establishment early in the nineteenth, its beatification in 1879, and finally its canonization in 1917.

*In your understanding, scholastic philosophy is waning. If that is indeed the case can philosophy be of use for any future belief in God?*

Perhaps the most significant defining point of an adequate contemporary Christian philosophy, in general, but with special reference to its study of God, would be that it should begin with a consideration of the needs of the Christian faith, not those of Greek metaphysics. The problem of God would then not have to be posed in terms of demonstrating the existence of God in abstraction from his nature. For the creed does not affirm, "I believe that God that is, a being whose concept is hereby presupposed, actually exists." Nor, "I believe that God, that is, a being whose existence is hereby presupposed, is truthfully to be attributed such-and-such notes, to the exclusion of others." The creed's affirmation, "I believe in God," bears upon a simple reality, the reality of God, which

cannot be analyzed into distinct aspects, however much the real unity of these aspects be thereafter asserted, without distorting the meaning of the belief. From this it follows that the Christian's act of faith must bear directly on the reality of God, not upon words or upon concepts; this is the corollary to the idea that God reveals himself, not words about or concepts of himself.

*Your comments remind me of the "As If" philosophy of Hans Vaihinger that requires that we act as if God really exists, whether he does or does not.*

I stress that faith must bear directly on the reality of God, in order to distinguish this from the doctrine of St. Thomas, according to which faith terminates at God himself through the mediation of the propositions of the creed. In brief, St. Thomas's doctrine is that belief in the propositions of the creed amounts to belief in God himself, because the propositions of the creed are true.

*Having studied within the scholastic tradition, I wonder if it is possible to transcend the conceptual dichotomy of God's essence and existence. Are we not bound by both the nature of our minds and the nature of reality to distinguish between the existence and the essence of God's nature?*

I believe that it is possible to transcend this dichotomy, that we are not by nature bound to it, any more than we are bound to affirm the real distinction of essence and existence in creatures in order to conceptualize their contingency. If we depart from Greek metaphysics at their Parmenidean root, knowledge is no longer an immaterial "intussusception" of reality, and the investigation of being is no longer guided by the equivalence of intelligibility and being.<sup>52</sup> Hence the contingency of creatures would not be conceived as a real distinction between essence and existence, but as that peculiar quality of their factuality which consists in their appearing, their coming-in-to-being, their sudden emergence, as it were, onto the cosmic stage without having been previously listed in the program. In other words, man's contingency is the fact that in order to be he

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<sup>52</sup> The "Parmenidean root" as Dewart calls it, translates as: "That which can be thought is identical with that which can be." The Greek philosopher, Parmenides of Elea, lived in the early part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE. A posthuman version might be stated: That which can be *virtually imagined* is identical with that which *is*."

must create himself. A metaphysics of presence such as Gabriel Marcel's, or an eschatological metaphysics such as Berdyaev's, do not conceive any reality as polarized by existence and essence. They are concerned with being in its empirical immediacy. They try to avoid every a priori construction such as that required to distinguish between essence and existence as constituents of reality as such. For such a philosophy would be concerned with showing how God himself in his reality is present to human experience. Its concern would be the presence and reality of God. Such a God, however, would not be even partially that of Greek metaphysics. For this would be an integrally Christian philosophy. Its God would be wholly and exclusively the Christian God.

*Given your reference to Parmenides, I have the sense that Hans Vaihinger was of the opinion, although about fifty years earlier, about the Parmenidean root. Permit me to read a passage from his book.*

Parmenides, as is well known, held that multiplicity and change were meaningless illusions; there was no beginning; all change and all separation were not true Being but Not-Being, something unreal and unthinkable. Only Being eternally at rest, unchanging, and unmoved, only what persisted in eternal, divine Sameness, was real. Existence is an indivisible whole, a uniform continuum, limitless and absolute. The world of sensory appearance, on the hand, is mere illusion, and unreal. Becoming and passing away are but a delusion of the senses.

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*With that having been said I would like to turn to your thoughts on the development of Christian theism. Earlier you spoke of a God who is not of Greek metaphysics. Do you care to speculate about how the notion of a God, not of Greek metaphysics, might develop presuming such a need is recognized, as you suggest?*

Once Christianity becomes fully conscious of the need for further developing its theism it is likely to reconceptualize consciously its belief in God. All history, but very specially perhaps Christian history, is freely and spontaneously made by the creative forces generated by man's interrelations with the ultimate reality, God. For this reason, history

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<sup>53</sup> Vaihinger, Hans (1965:138) *The Philosophy of "As If: A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind* Routledge, Kegan Paul.

is radically unforeseeable. Nevertheless, what is radically unforeseeable may well be empirically predictable, though we may not say what final goal we are bound to arrive at, we can determine in which direction we are already going. We can forecast what points we are likely to traverse, on the basis of the decisions we have already taken and on the assumption that we will follow them through.

*What major point do you forecast in this regard?*

The truth that Christianity needs for its health, protection and development is the reality of man's individual and cultural growth in self-consciousness. We now stand on a very uncertain terrain.

*Given this uncertain terrain of self-consciousness, can we ever be sure about the being and existence of God?*

What the religious experience of God discloses is a reality beyond being. I do not suggest that if God is beyond being he is empirically unknowable, or that he is, unless we use the term hyperbolically, ineffable. Nor does saying that God is a reality beyond being mean that he can be experienced only mystically or through affective knowledge or connaturality. For unless we retain the Greek metaphysical outlook, the ordinary facts of Christian experience are sufficient to establish that we do experience God, but that we do not experience him as being. We should determine what consequences for our understanding of God follow from this observation, rather than the consequences for our understanding of faith, within the general presuppositions of the Greek theories of knowledge, that follow from the presupposition that the God in whom we believe is the Supreme Being.

*If God is not to be experienced as being, how is God to be experienced?*

What we must do is to open ourselves to that which transcendence reveals. God's real presence to us and, therefore, his reality in himself, does not depend upon his being a being or an object. In fact, our belief in the Christian God is post-primitive to the degree

that we apprehend that although there is no super-being behind beings, no supreme being who stands at the summit of the hierarchy of being, nevertheless a reality beyond the totality of being reveals itself by its presence.

*How do we know something is “there,” beyond being?*

The reality of human transcendence discloses the presence of a reality beyond all actual and possible empirical intuition. In the presence of myself to myself I find that over and above my own agency, and indeed as the ultimate condition of the possibility of that agency, there is a presence which reveals me to myself in a supererogatory and gratuitous way, that is, by making me more fully myself than I should be if I were not exposed to its impact.

*If God is waiting to make me conscious of myself, he must be “there” in some form, no?*

The presence of God does not exhibit him as a prior, anterior, supra-temporal or eternal reality. It manifests him as a present one. The point can hardly be missed once we rid ourselves of any hellenic compulsion to think of God as the First, or the Last, Cause, or as the *arche*<sup>54</sup> and *aitia*<sup>55</sup> of existence, or as the Supreme Being. We can philosophically account for man’s experience of God in terms which are not intrinsically inadequate, if we first account for human experience in more adequate terms than Scholasticism does.

*Scholasticism accounts for knowledge “of” God for our benefit in terms which you consider inadequate. What about in terms of personal meaning “for” God in himself?*

God does not have meaning in-and-for-himself, though he can have, of course, meaning for us. The problem for Christian philosophy is to explore that reality and, in the first place, to try to understand the meaning of God’s simultaneous presence and absence. But this does not mean that we must determine whether an actually existing thing-in-itself corresponds to the object of thought, God. What needs to be proven is not that a God-

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<sup>54</sup> *arche*: (Greek) reflecting the sense of “beginning,” “origin” or “source of action,” and in later philosophy the first principle or element.

<sup>55</sup> *aitia*: (Greek) cause or reason.

being objectively exists. What requires a demonstration, for it is not immediately obvious, is God's presence. Whether it be in what sense, in what way, and with what consequences, God is present. Present, in the first place to himself, though this is largely a theological problem.

*As a theological problem, where do you see God as present?*

Present, in any event, to being, present to world, present to man, present to man's faith, present to the Church, present to history, and present to the future that we create. In the future we may well learn to conceive God in a nobler way. The question would always remain open whether our self-creation will or will not proceed so as to make God to-exist-for-us.

*All that being said, I would like to ask a particular question or two concerning a meaningful concept of God. I suspect that your answers will not simply recast classical knowledge in contemporary terms. First, what have you to say about the personality of God?*

Christian theism might in the future not conceive God as a person, or indeed as a Trinity of persons. The concept of person remains, of course, metaphorically adequate for theism. Personality has been accorded to God as long as the concept has taken its place in a philosophy for which it was what is most perfect in all nature. In our contemporary understanding of personality, however, this is no longer true. We no longer find it fitting or truly fair to the nature of God to preoccupy ourselves with granting to God the infinite degree of the creaturely perfections. Moreover, personality is no longer apt to signify any perfection transcending man, because we no longer understand personality in relation to Nature, since we do not understand being as a hierarchy of perfection and reality. I assume here, of course, that man has evolved from the animal, but that being, though created, has not evolved from God. Behind this is the fact that the very approach of the contemporary mind to an understanding of every reality, including personality, is at variance with the hellenic approach. The ultimate reason why God was fittingly conceived as a supra-rational person is the same as the reason why he was fittingly conceived as the super-being, that is, for the hellenic mind to understand any given kind



of being was to find its proper place in a hierarchical scheme of being which ran from the highest to the lowest.

*Then what today replaces the hellenic hierarchical approach of the past?*

Today we do not understand man as a rational animal because we do not understand him as an animal to begin with. Now, the contemporary mind does not conceive man as a body, organized and potentially having life, to which consciousness is somehow united.

*Now we are back to your uncertain terrain of an independent consciousness.*

Consciousness is the constituent of man. It is equivalent to life and existence. Personal conscious existence is all that we have of ourselves in order to create ourselves in time. This means that personality is the summit of man's actuality, but hardly the summit he hopes to achieve. Man is the being who is sufficiently perfect to tend to transcend personality.

*So, it would seem to me that I can engage in holistic thinking for a clue to myself, my existence. That is, "I am greater than the sum of my individuated parts."*

A person is a being who knows enough to want to go beyond himself. But the idea is scarcely new. In the most ancient Christian tradition, too, man's ultimate achievement is not found in the circumscription of his personality. It is found on the contrary in its communication and expansion beyond itself into another self, indeed, into a community of selves. The ultimate hope of the Christian faith is not that man should achieve within himself the act of beholding God, a vision close enough to constitute an intimate union with God. It is to achieve an intimate union with every person through a union with God in God himself, to achieve a going-out-of-one-self-into-God, an out-going that is real enough to constitute a self-transformation.

*In light of this transcendental out-going in life, what do you make of the disaffiliated religious thinker, a Lone Ranger, as it were?*

The typical experience of the disaffiliated religious person today is that God could not possibly be a person. He must be some kind of cosmic force. This is surely a naive view to the degree that it implies that God is less than man. But this is not all that this common expression connotes. It also means that God is, rather than a centre of being to which we are drawn, an expansive force which impels persons to go out from and beyond themselves. This expression represents an effort, born of understandable impatience, to transcend the primitive God-being, God-object and God-person of absolute theism. The truth that that crude expression so mistakenly conceives may yet be redeemed in the future by Christian theism.

*I am led to ask: what about the omnipotence of God?*

If we immediately proceed to conceive God as having, or, for that matter, as being, omnipotence, eternity, immateriality, infinity, immutability, omniscience, etc., in the last analysis what matters is the attributes themselves. The question is rather, what can, and what, if anything, cannot happen, once God and man enter into personal relations. The problem is not how to explain a metaphysical property of God which would have implications for us, but how to understand the reciprocal relations between man and God and, in particular, how mutual power enters into the relationship.

*Does mutual power have to do with co-creatorship? If so, and if I am in a relationship with God, am I not God, or at least part of God, in some sense?*

The problem has to do, as it were, with the politics of man and God. If God is a true reality truly present to being, there are true relations between God and creatures. The politics of this relation should be understood accordingly, that is, in terms of reciprocal being-with, rather than in those of acting and being acted upon. If a Christian looks at the world and understands nature through hellenic eyes, he will find it necessary to assert the omnipotence of God over and against nature. For in this view of nature, either God is necessitated by it, or it is subject to God.

*What are we most likely to see in our contemporary experience without “hellenic eyes,” as you describe it?*

In the contemporary experience nature is no longer understood as the principle which necessitates from within the operations of beings, and therefore makes them resist violence from without. We do not see nature as the source of independence and self-sufficiency which it was for Aristotle. Let us rather say that nature does not have its own natural finalities independently of God's. The case is not that God can do the impossible, that is, that God has power to do that which nature cannot do, but that for God all things are possible and that, therefore, with God all things are possible to man. In God nature can do anything. The moral implication of this is that once it no longer has God's omnipotence to fall back on, our Christian conscience may be awakened to feel its adult responsibilities for taking the full initiative in restoring all things in Christ and for exercising its creative ingenuity in order to determine how this should be done.

*If we are truly responsible for our future, must I believe that God is not all-powerful, but rather limited in some fashion by my presence?*

The trouble is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for many Christians, and their numbers proliferate daily, to believe in the authoritarian God as traditionally understood. Indeed, some find themselves compelled by their Christian faith, and constrained by their loyalty to Christ, to his Church, and to the living History in which they live and breathe, positively and actively to dis-believe in a divine being who is only in degree and in detail different from primitive deities or from philosophical gods. They find themselves compelled by their Christian faith to dis-believe in a Supreme Being, in a God behind whose kindness and generosity to man stands a supreme, omnipotent and eternal will.

*Again, does this not reduce God's exalted status?*

We may yet judge that we have not sufficiently well appreciated in the past that to place God at the summit of creation is to place him in an insufficiently noble station in the world. To say that God is the highest and the first being, and that he has to the infinite degree all the creaturely perfections, may not be nearly enough to begin to approximate

the transcendent reality of God. To multiply infinities is not the way to transcend them. He seems rather to rule himself by the principle of noblesse oblige, so that being the noblest he is also the humblest reality, not having hesitated to give man the freedom that renders him capable of true personal friendship and partnership in the creation of history and world. It may be significant that religion is the last area within the Christian world where the institution of homage is consciously and unashamedly retained.

*Following this logic, then, I need not continue to worship the child born at Christmas time.*

Worship might be better understood as the rendering of ourselves present to the presence of God, whether in the interior prayer which sends no message to God but which receives his presence, or in the public and common ceremonies which visibly, audibly and sensibly unite us through our collective presence to each other in the presence of the present God.

*With these profound thoughts, we conclude this final segment. My penultimate question is: In all the issues addressed by philosophy and theology, are we not becoming less spiritual?*

In recent times, as philosophy has diverged more and more from its Greek presuppositions, and as nature and essence have ceased to be understood as intelligible necessities, the concept of the supernatural has lost its usefulness for Christian theism. This is one concrete reason why, as I have already suggested, since the mainstream of Catholic philosophy has remained Scholastic and hence unsympathetic to the contemporary understanding of nature, Catholic theology, especially in those circles that have consciously abandoned Scholasticism for example, the Teilhardians, or in those specialties that were never dominated by it, for example, in scriptural studies, has increasingly turned to non-Christian secular thought for philosophical help. Although one might wish to avoid the terms naturalism and secularism on account of their historical association with philosophies that are not easily reconcilable with the Christian faith, the fact is that Catholic thought and experience tends with increasing rapidity to interpret Christian belief in the terms of the temporal history of natural entities.

*Finally, are we thus opening the door to secularism by casting belief in terms of the temporal history of natural entities?*

It is most important to note that in this formula the term natural is the equivalent of historically factual. I should incidentally remark that this has profound implications for an understanding of the relation of faith and scientific enquiry, and in particular for the problems of the nature and methods of Christian philosophy and theology. I suggest that in the future we may not feel the need to conceive God as a super-natural being. If we discard the hellenic view of nature, the Christian God no longer must, in order to remain free, gracious and freely self-giving, perform super-natural feats, undertake super-natural functions and roles, or enjoy super-natural status. The traditional Christian faith could then be reasserted under new forms which might make more meaningful and vivid the concepts of grace and charity than the theory of the super-natural has done in the past.

## PART II

# REFLECTIONS ON WESTERN ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

### 0.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

The notions I present here for discussion are, in fact, not new. As ideas they have been discussed for a very long time in Western philosophy. They may appear “new to you” as a thinker exploring for the first time, or continuing to explore, the philosophical relationships that give meaning to human life in the cosmos. Whatever “newness” there is in this book arises in the reader's subjective awareness or consciousness of what the mind has come to apprehend in place of its previous understanding. The reader may find much that is familiar in this short book but at the same time will be presented with a re-casting of the ideas that constitutes a new conception of those ideas and offers the possibility of a new philosophical perspective.

The purpose of this little book is to view critically the dialectic between two Western disciplines: philosophy and theology. A dialectic is the art of discussion that involves the posing of questions and the giving of answers as first practiced by Socrates (circa 470-399 B.C.E.). I intend this book as a point of departure for reflection by the reader on his or her experience in interpreting philosophical issues. In the West a long tradition of human thought is reflected through a dialectical relationship between philosophy and theology. By reflecting upon human life and experience in the context of a philosophical and theological relationship Western religious individuals and

communities have learned something of the divine.

Those readers looking for an exhaustive treatment of the philosophical and theological disciplines characteristic of the Christian tradition will not find it in this book. Those seeking to discount, debunk or replace theology with a secular philosophy will be equally disappointed. As well, those theologians who seek to defend philosophy as a God-given, but human wisdom, supported through theological revelation will also be disappointed. My aim in this book is not to debunk, defend or criticize either discipline. Rather, it is to examine the acknowledged relationship, in a particular context, between philosophy and theology and thereby to develop an understanding that assigns meaning to human intellectual activity.

The reflections in this book represent my personal rendering of the dialectical relationship between philosophy and theology that makes life humanly and spiritually enriching. It is my hope that in these reflections, others will discover for themselves, through their own personal experience, that life which is humanly and spiritually enriching. To that end I invite the readers to put aside, for the time being at least, all traditionally inherited opinions about philosophy and theology and ponder the relationships that I present here. I suggest that when our thinking becomes consciously self-reflective, we are on our way to knowledge of that which illuminates our place in the cosmos.

Gathering the ideas from a variety of authors whom I have read over the years I have incorporated their ideas into my own conscious understanding. Readers who are familiar with the writings and philosophical perspectives of Friedrich von Hügel, Albert Schweitzer, David Rasmussen, Ken Wilber, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Karl Marx will recognize their ideas reflected in this essay on ecological philosophy and Christian theology, but not as necessarily as originally presented by their authors. That is because I enquire into the unity of ecological philosophy and Christian theology. In such unity, critically thinking philosophers and theologians may come to see a purpose in the *élan vital* (vital force) of evolution and that human meaning is part of a larger emergent meaning within the cosmos.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WHAT IS ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY?

#### 1.1 THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

The notions discussed here are a part of an emerging ecological philosophy in the West. Ecological philosophy, construed broadly, is a purposely friendly approach to the environment and states the reasons for this approach. Ecological philosophy intends to be friendly towards all forms of creation, living and inert, and again states the reasons why. Further, it intends to be friendly with our own minds and bodies and states the reasons why. Ecological philosophy is a rich philosophical system with a particular consciousness of metaphysics, epistemology and theology. Free from a Hellenic cosmological inheritance, ecological philosophy is a philosophy of becoming (therefore, dynamic) and not a philosophy of being (therefore, static) in which evolution is at the center of its development. In short, ecological philosophy is a new philosophy which is holistic (i.e., an entity is greater than the sum of its parts) and environmentally sensitive, relevant to life and which can be used for healing the planet and humanity.

Where does the key to understanding ecological philosophy lie? If we examine the global ecological situation from a sustainable perspective should we recognize that the key to understanding ecological philosophy lies in the conscious reconstruction of our relationship with our total environment. A conscious philosophical reconstruction would aim at ending the exploitation of one part of the ecological system by another and at directing the efforts of society towards an intentional and balanced relationship within the total environment, or cosmos.



In these postmodern times the relationship among philosophy, theology and science continues its estrangement. The sciences have separated themselves from the search for a uniform view of the cosmos and no longer insist upon shaping their methodologies in light of the need for a uniform view of the universe. This view had been inherited from classical Western philosophy prior to the Enlightenment. That is, they no longer shape their investigative methodology presuming that a simple, ultimately fixed purpose or goal unites the cosmos. In fact, they are actively embracing an ecological point of view that is characterized by a pluralistic perspective. Ecological philosophy, characterizing modern science, does not compartmentalize knowledge but contemplates the entire spectrum of human knowledge that constitutes the environment in a holistic relationship. Without an ecological philosophy, no becoming is possible; without becoming, no material and spiritual evolution of the cosmos is possible.

It profits humanity nothing, however, to attempt a return to the uncritical perspective of classical Western philosophy, but it does profit humanity to turn critically to ecological philosophy. Nor, does it profit humanity to follow uncritically and blindly any “new-age” philosophy, but it does profit humanity to embrace a specifically new philosophy with an open attitude concerning the relationship among philosophy, theology and science.

Modern science is the perpetual inquiry into the being of the physical universe, ceaselessly redefining the facts in light of the discovery of error in order to substitute in our consciousness something nearer the way the physical universe actually operates. The significance of an ecological philosophical perspective to science is that it ensures that pre-scientific philosophers do not impose their value system on scientific thinking. Ecological philosophers simply demonstrate, or disclose, in a non-invasive hermeneutic (interpretive) fashion, a human consciousness of the relationships among the animate and inanimate constituents of the environment.

Continuing scientific and technical progress has caused an unprecedented growth in interactive human relationships with the environment and vice versa. Humans have built societies that continue to alter, either negatively or positively, their inherited environment. We are now literally capable of moving mountains, reversing rivers, creating new seas, and transforming huge deserts into fertile oases. In general, we are in a position to interact

with our environment without limit, radically remaking the ecological context. However, we cannot and must not interact with our environment without self-imposed restrictions, without being prepared to compensate for the possible negative consequences of our activities. The more deeply and widely we interact with our environment managing its components, the more certainly we begin to recognize that we cannot treat the environment as an inexhaustible treasure house without caring how it is altered.

Philosophers of science strive to reach an explanation of all knowledge of the finite and contingent. By way of contrast, Western ecological philosophers and theologians feel the call to organize all scientific and philosophical insight into one worldview. The current approach of Western ecological philosophers and theologians to ecology reflects more and more a synthesis, or integration, of the previously separated areas of scientific knowledge and environmental activity. Ecological philosophers and techno-digital scientists are beginning to take into account more seriously human environmental issues. They are becoming increasingly concerned for the sustainability of the environment through all possible philosophical and scientific means.

## 1.2 THE FOCUS-MATTER OF ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

In 1866, Ernst Haeckel, while studying the evolutionary character of natural selection, proposed the term *oecology* to describe his study. *Oecology*, or ecology, comes from the Greek word, οἶκος, meaning house, dwelling or habitat. Ecology, like many other scientific terms, has two different senses. The first sense is dynamic. It means the process or activity of interactive relationships within the environment. The second sense is static. It means the theoretical scientific discipline itself. The context of a discussion determines the intended sense. An ecological philosophy is essential in understanding an environmental approach to life. This is so since every environmental system is objectively related. In fact, an environmental eco-system is composed of various threads or sub-systems acting in relation to or in concert with all other threads, or sub-systems, that make up the human eco-sphere. Given this understanding, each thread may be

conceived as a system and each system may function as a thread in a broader system.<sup>56</sup>

As a discipline, ecological philosophy investigates the conditions of existence of living organisms and the mutual relations between organisms and the world they inhabit. Although no eco-logical philosopher, Charles Darwin's conception of the evolution of species has supplied a focus for ecological philosophers. Within his thinking, natural selection played an important role as the ecological philosophers have acknowledged. The concept of natural selection reveals that the interactive relationship between a species and its habitat is one of the primary factors governing biological evolution.

When a new consciousness of the environment comes to light there often follows a new formulation of an ecological philosophical stance within the environment. Hardly anything has a more urgent claim on us today than a new philosophical ecological consciousness. Only when we conceive ourselves at home in the universe and not estranged from it can we create a cooperative society reflecting the unity of the experience of being philosophically at home in the universe. However, an ecological philosophical stance does not reflect any universal consciousness and does not necessarily reveal the sources out of which it has been formulated. If we look around us, or if we analyze our own selves, we find many types of human and infra-human activity. We find an interaction, a tension, a giving and taking, a hostility and a friendship. We also experience a bridging and a breaking between the material (physical) and the mental (metaphysical), between the present and the past, and between the individual and the collective. Individually, we experience claims by our bodies on our minds and claims by our minds upon our bodies. Collectively, we find the claims of other personalities, or of our own personalities, upon our present existence. From an eco-philosophical perspective, these claims affect the family, society, nation, race, or religious tradition to which we belong.

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<sup>56</sup> What is an environmental thread, you may ask? Compare it to a digital code within a computer programme that relates a sequence of events with a beginning, and an end, and at any given moment shows a "trace" of what has been taking place, or how events have been occurring. Keep in mind that a thread is not the whole programme but only a part of the programme. To appreciate a computerized thread in its role in constituting the whole programme, a thread must be examined and followed as to how it is interwoven. That is to say that a thread has a certain independence of its own within a programme, yet forming in combination with other threads, part of a particular programme. In the metaphor, the digital code (the sequence of identified events) works as a particular explanation within a particular programme.

Ecological philosophers recognize themselves not only as social creatures but also as intellectual ones. As a result of this recognition any alteration of the environment by their activity is brought about consciously. An ecological philosophy that is the basis of a conscious evolution of the environment examines the relationships of all social activity. Ecological philosophers ponder the environment qualitatively. Ecological philosophers suggest changes to the technological and philosophical approach to our existing socio-political relationships. To think *sub specie machinae* (in light of physical forces) replaces the view of the infallible God as well as the view of fallible humanity, but minus significant human involvement. Thinking *sub specie machinae* is not supported by human experience, hence the need of an appropriate ecological philosophy. In the contemporary Western context, we cannot escape technology as affecting our personal being any more than we can escape eating, breathing, and thinking. The important thing is to learn from techno-digital experience is an expanded way of living.

However, ecological philosophers who keep contact with reality must look objectively to the cosmos. The cosmos existed long before we came upon it. Concerning the future of humanity, Albert Schweitzer has remarked, “Who knows but that the earth will circle round the sun once more without man upon it?”<sup>57</sup> We must, therefore, not place ourselves at the center of the cosmos, but understand ourselves in relation to it, somewhat as artists experience their place within modern technology; somewhat as participants in an all-embracing relationship to the environment that develops our abilities and responsibilities. We need to remember that all significant pre-Christian philosophers, especially those of ancient Greece, regarded life as an art, and regarded science only as the theory of that art.

### 1.3 METHODOLOGY IN ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

Here, I discuss some of the basic methodological principles of an ecological philosophy. These principles are rooted in scientific knowledge and social activity or praxis. Scientific knowledge and social praxis deepen our understanding of an ecological philosophy and help shape a more effective strategy for environmental sustainability.

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<sup>57</sup> Albert Schweitzer (1999:4) *The Spiritual Life: Selected Writings of Albert Schweitzer* Ecco Press.

The basic principle of an eco-philosophy is that of dialectics. Through dialectics, we can distinguish the evolution of our social relationships, from their simplest to their highest forms. We can also distinguish the self-organized, objective patterns of interaction of a society and of an individual. Dialectics is a most useful philosophical approach in disclosing the relationships of the social sciences to the environment.

It is important for us to realize that our consciousness does not embrace reality fully and cannot alter or abolish the objective patterns of nature, society, or the formation of the human personality. Nor can consciousness determine the process of its coming to an awareness of functioning and of developing. These patterns operate objectively and independently whether they are recognized or not. The general course of events always contains elements of the conscious and the unconscious, the realized and unrealized, the foreseen and unforeseen, in a historically changing relationship. However, our consciousness of the facts of experience influence our intentional activity. Thus, humans can create a heightened role within their decision-making processes for consciousness regarding their relationship with the environment. We may account for a consciously creative role in society via the two disciplines of the existential and spiritual life, philosophy and theology. In the Christian tradition each gives to and receives from the other. This is so since human consciousness consists of both philosophy and theology as the history of ideas has shown.

The methodology of phenomenological eco-philosophy gives rise to the notion of holism in integrating life sustaining values within the human environment. The emergence of a holistic view of life within our present experience challenges theologians to face the issue of joining with philosophers in raising consciousness through a phenomenological methodology. A phenomenological methodology discloses the possibility of a co-creative human status within the environment.

#### 1.4 THE DESIGN OF AN ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

Our life is constantly changing, extending into and perfecting itself within our environment. Overall, I note that our invasive action upon the environment is disclosing the variety of all its life forms. This variety arises from the fact that initially our life is not

consciously experienced as a unity but as a multiplicity. We live within a number of social, theoretical, ethical, and moral purposes whose unity is not our conscious starting point but rather an intended goal which is, in fact, harkens back to a pre-reflective consciousness. But there is more to eco-philosophy than a nostalgic return to an imagined unified status. Ecological philosophers in order to free themselves from the constraints of the scholasticism of the Middle Ages, find it necessary to understand modern life and to conceive an anthropology that re-constructs the contemporary subject in terms that are essentially different from those of the Middle Ages. A Marxist interpretation of the subject is one such example of the design of an ecological philosophy.

In designing an ecological philosophy based on our experience, the question arises: Do we need to return to understand nature as interpreted in a pre-scientific philosophical perspective? The notion that we need to return to pre-scientific understanding is not new and is, in fact, quite common. The high degree of interest in traditional spiritual interpretation is an example of this. This desire to return to pre-scientific interpretation may be interpreted in various ways. In hindsight, we see that ecological philosophy has passed through various evolutionary phases. Among the first was Darwinism. Darwinism, as a philosophy, gave rise to an evolutionary understanding of the environment. It conceived the focus of philosophy to be the evolutionary science of relationships of an organism with its environment. Such philosophy eventually involved into ecological philosophy which focuses on the biological sciences to the present day. Darwinism, in its various expressions, understood the human population as a biological and social phenomenon within the environment. One such expression, Marxism, presents an example from the “social sciences” in understanding the evolutionary patterns of society’s interaction with the environment. Marxist patterns identified the human population as a materialistic, social, and biological phenomenon, a conception derived from that of Darwin’s evolutionary perspective.

For ecological phenomenological philosophy to function as a design, one has to understand in a double sense. First, ecological philosophy discloses the expression of an integrated understanding of the subject’s own experience of the environment. Second, an ecological philosophy is but part of the whole of our collective experiential outlook. In its design, an ecological phenomenological philosophy takes into account both senses.

## 1.5 THE NORMATIVE CHARACTER OF ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

Ecological philosophy constitutes a normative, or ethical, character of human activity. As a phenomenological philosophical stance, or way of interpreting experience, it provides for thresholds that disclose further knowledge and meaning of ethical social activity. In our thinking, humans formalize such thinking that arises from our experience because only then will the intended purpose of our actions be recognized. Much current Western philosophizing is preoccupied with discussions on secondary issues. These discussions have lost touch with the elemental and existential questions regarding life and its environment. They have become theoretical questions finding satisfaction when discussing problems of a purely academic nature. Many Western philosophers have been occupied with elucidating philosophy itself, instead of struggling to achieve a cosmic view that would lead to real change in the environment and in human self-understanding. Mostly Western philosophers have not been governed by the notion that the one thing needful is a relational unity of ourselves with the cosmos. Rather, they have continued to emphasize the dichotomy between the cosmos and humanity. Thus, humanity is in danger of being satisfied with lowered ideals and with an inferior conception of the cosmos.

In preventing satisfaction with lowered ideals and an inferior conception of the cosmos ecological philosophy has an important role to play in the development of an advanced society. An ecological philosophy discloses an integrating norm within both the individual and society, such that neither the individual nor society becomes subject to the other. Each preserves its proper status in a mutual relationship. Within an ecological philosophy all the sciences freely admit that their normative disclosures of reality are subject to reconstruction.

Normative development within an ecological philosophy transforms the reality around us quite naturally. An ecological philosophy transcends the constraints of Hellenistic thought, providing new thresholds for further development and philosophical criticism. Transcending Hellenistic constraints represents a stage in the evolution of human thought. The evolution of ecological philosophy is an extremely complicated and many-sided activity requiring a restructuring of the human awareness of the environment



and the social restructuring of the components of the environment. In place of contemporary analytical thinking, phenomenological philosophical thinking may serve a useful purpose in disclosing an intended purpose of social and ethical development.

Within the norms of designing an ecological philosophy, various personally-focused and ethical questions arise. Shall I relate only to myself and not care for others? Shall I like only my kind of human being and dislike all other kinds of human beings? Shall I attend only to humans and ignore other species? Do I attend only to sentient beings and thereby omit that which is divine? It is becoming apparent to enlightened thinkers that ecological philosophy, along with a spiritual knowledge discloses an opportunity for humans to explore the dimensions of depth, growth, development and enhancement of the questions arising within our contemporary environment.

## 1.6 CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING IN ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

Within human history, significant crises have arisen more than once in our relationships within the cosmos. In recent decades, qualitative shifts have occurred in interpreting our relationships to the environment. Today we have reached several critical points in areas affecting the environment such as water and air pollution, greenhouse gases, and sustainability of resources. The present ecological context presents a unique opportunity for the critical philosophical understanding of the environment. The critical philosophical understanding of modern society discloses opportunities for improved relationships with our environment. Ecological philosophy, a critical philosophy in its own right, has an influence on the construction of social and existential systems that form these relationships with the environment. Therefore, it is expedient for us to contemplate the subject-object relationship in eco-philosophy in more detail within a phenomenological perspective. It is also very important to understand the processes of our interaction with the environment as phenomena and to develop methods for a comprehensive and fundamentally new approach to future development. One aspect of this process is to contemplate the dynamics of the environment as an organism and the transformation of it caused by human intervention. In that connection, enlightened philosophers talk of an intellectual and existential revolution aimed at taking into greater



account the ecological principles of development beyond the biological sciences.

The need to understand the human connection phenomenologically with the environment is beginning to take hold of the Western mind. Phenomenological philosophers realize that the principles disclosed in an ecological understanding of the environment depend on the social conditions that satisfy the spiritual and ecological needs of the individual. Given this context, we can distinguish the collective human mind from the singular human mind. The collective human mind is crafted out of the activity of singular human minds which continue a dialogue among themselves that constitutes part of our cosmic environment.

Given the human existential context the only true philosophical object is the subject who experiences. No other forms of life philosophize. Human critical understanding in ecological philosophy takes place within the national and economic culture and other features of the human environment. Thus, we are subsequently presented with a considerable variety of philosophical opinions serving as the basis for a democratic involvement within the environment and, at the same time, deepening our awareness of social consciousness.

The global character of ecological difficulties calls for a re-evaluation of philosophical perspectives on an international scale. Philosophers who remain within the classical metaphysical modes of thinking cannot envision a re-evaluated approach. Not understanding the dialectics of a phenomenological philosophical understanding, classical metaphysical thinkers presume a non-Hellenistic perspective to be an error and the cause of many epistemological problems. Failing to understand that philosophical thinking was evolving before the scientific era, classical philosophers have underestimated the potential for a phenomenological philosophical point of view arising out of the traditional Western point of view. The phenomenological point of view requires a revolution in epistemological thinking, that ranks quantitative philosophical thinking as secondary to qualitative philosophical thinking. In the quantitative philosophical approach humans "conquer" nature and sap the natural foundations of their own life by disrupting the interaction between themselves and the environment in which they live. In short, contemporary Western thinkers must evolve out of a scholastic philosophy into phenomenological philosophy.

The human environment stimulates and evokes an intellectual response from philosophers. An intellectual response becomes effective only when the evolution of ideas is appreciated. Yet, in critically evaluating any new views and subsequently abandoning inadequate ideas philosophers must not forget that the truth is not exclusively, nor ultimately, apprehended through philosophical consciousness alone. Critical reflection cannot remain as a theory. It must become a praxis. That is why, when trying to solve certain problems, we also have to be extremely cautious of our philosophical understanding, treating it only as an opportunity for further reflection on human experience. Philosophical understanding develops over the course of time and only then within the minds of individuals who have been reflecting over generations on their experience. In short, everyone is not a philosopher. Critical understanding, as such, has not been able to do more than evaluate and clarify convictions and reveal from within its focus certain limitations and possibilities that tend to converge towards a better future.

### 1.7 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

Since Descartes, Western philosophers have divided the environment into parts and elements in order to understand it more conveniently. They contrast and compare one part with another to construct what appears as a total understanding to the inquirer. Today, however, it is necessary to study the environment not through compartmentalizing it, but by apprehending it holistically and interpreting the knowledge gained with the intent to understand the immanent and transcendent relationships of all its constituent parts. In that respect, it is reasonable to ask which philosophical stance or approach may become the most advantageous point of departure for an integrating ecological philosophy. A phenomenological approach is the answer. The methodology of a phenomenological approach leads us to understand our experience from a coaxial perspective. We must interpret our experience with respect to both the vertical and the horizontal perspectives, of the appearance of our environment, as it were. As well, truth is disclosed in a phenomenological knowledge of a coaxial subjective and objective perspective of the world of human existence.

A phenomenological consciousness rejects a metaphysical dichotomy or

ontological separation between subject and object. Subject and object are ontologically distinguishable but not separable. A relational unity of subject and object appears within an environment through a phenomenological consciousness. This relational unity discloses human life to be the highest form of social existence in an ecological system.

The most important principle of a phenomenological ecological philosophy is the interaction between that which is perceived as subject and that which is conceived as object in a dialectical relationship. We must understand this dialectic as a developmental process, rather than as an ideology. That is, interactivity necessarily constitutes the unity of the social life with the environment within the human universe. However, human will not resolve the philosophical and environmental problems of existence by blotting out the dualism, not duality, experienced within our universe. It is only by conceiving these relationships as a duality, not dualism, which no longer has any divisive or dichotomous character within our experience can humans resolve their philosophical and environmental problems. In other words, from a phenomenological perspective, humans may conceive themselves to be at home in the universe and as being co-creating constituents of the universe.

## 1.8 HUMANITARIANISM AND ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

The necessity of a humanitarian view of the world emerges from human experience of the environment as the place in which the needs and the aspirations of humanity, both individually and collectively, enter their consciousness. Because of technical advancement, the material world that constitutes the environment has already shown the product of humanity's activity. This transformation of the environment by means of modern technique demonstrates the necessity of balancing humanity's physical, social, inner, and transcendental worlds. This is not to say that there is more than one world, but only the *lebenswelt*, or the life-world of experience of the individual. This balancing or harmonization of relationships is one of the most important aspects of modern humanitarianism. Human relationships within the environment occupies a major focus among the philosophical issues of contemporary research. However, no matter how great the significance of the material environment is, philosophers must not underestimate the

importance of the transcendental aspect of the environment. The disclosure of the transcendental aspect of the environment is truly of global significance.

The transcendental aspect of the environment not only concerns the individual intellectual and emotional outlook; it also embraces all the collective forms of relationships beginning with the family, through all types of communities, all gradations of social levels, classes, nations, states, and countries that regulate human activity. Humanitarian philosophers pay much attention to what Western thinkers sometimes call the “identity crisis,” that is, the loss of a sense of one’s place in a modern, constantly changing world and a loss of human self-esteem and intrinsic value. We are faced with the danger of forgetting something that is, ultimately, a most important point. When philosophizing about global problems affecting the broad population and even humanity as a whole, it is the single person, the unique personality, which must be considered as primary.

The focus of ecological philosophy is often directed to the external environment, with a concern for the preservation of the environment. Nevertheless, life calls our attention to the human personality and to the deeper relationships in community life in order to discover how to avoid the disasters that often threaten our environment. In the search for the most effective forms of philosophical consciousness, our attention is naturally concentrated on problems affecting the mass of people. The attention given by philosophers to epistemology has a long history. Their attention to epistemology is complex and varied and takes into account many factors closely interwoven with the issue of human knowledge. Thus, we need to think about the individual as he or she relates to the transcendental (metaphysical) dimension within the cosmos.

What is meant by saying that human reason makes life physically better and transcendently richer? It may be said that it is a matter of understanding one’s own identity in relationship to the physical and metaphysical environment. A proper understanding of human identity, which is the illuminative purpose of all philosophies, resolves the root conflicts within all human interactions and the conflicts within the environment. In other words, it is in understanding humanity’s place in the cosmos that human reason makes life physically better and transcendently richer. Humans resemble, but differ from, other things in the cosmos. Identity is the understanding of

human significance in the context of the cosmos. Identity issues arise from individuals and the group within a human environment within the cosmos. Identity, as disclosed by ecological philosophy, is not an ultimate, nor a self-subsisting idea. Rather, it is the notion of the individual as an evolving, organic subject, a becoming, not a being. Identity, for humans, arises from the self-reflexive activity of the individual within the environment, or in transcendental activity, or both.

A phenomenological consciousness of human identity leaves no possibility for a transcendental void. Human identity serves as the basis of physical and metaphysical life and as a unique personality of true worth. Thus, the task of a phenomenological ecological philosophy is to make a deep unprejudiced evaluation and to seek ways of overcoming any cause that may result in de-personalization and de-identification resulting in a socially and transcendently impoverished existence. Failing to undertake this humanitarian evaluation leads to an identity crisis and to despair and self-annihilation.

## 1.9 THE PHILOSOPHICAL EVOLUTION OF ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS

To some critics, philosophers have merely interpreted the world in various ways; however, according to Marx in his 11th thesis on Feuerbach, the point is to change the world. This is a new posing of the ecological problem. The Marxist perspective has had revolutionary significance in developing new concerning society and the environment. The notion of an ecological philosophy that changes the world has evolved comparatively recently. Global ecology and social ecology have become contemporary expressions of our concern for the environment and are among the most recognized global issues of modern times. We have become aware of the significance of ecological issues as the planet has ceased to be an unlimited absorber of the wastes of industry. Signs of irreversible degeneration in the environment began to appear as the scale and intensity of abuse of the environment increased. For many philosophers this has turned their attention to the dialectical principles uniting the social life and the environment, and to engage in an effort to revise and improve humanity's social relationship with the environment.

A phenomenological philosophical understanding of the evolution of ecological relations between society and the environment discloses a new pattern of the existential interaction of subject and object in the cosmos. Humans engage in the highest form of existential activity known, that is, in reasoned social activity.

In a cosmos that reveals an inter-subjective transcendence to its inhabitants the physical environment is at a lower level in the hierarchy of the forms of being. With this realization in mind, the French paleontologist and Christian evolutionist, Teilhard de Chardin, has remarked that if humanity had had unlimited opportunities to spread and settle from the very beginning, its development would have been something quite unimaginable. The thresholds of interaction of humanity within the environment need to include a transcendent consciousness. Thresholds of interaction that include a transcendent consciousness present the possibility of establishing goals and creating the means to promote the evolution of human activity.

#### 1.10 THE SOCIO-CULTURAL ORIGIN OF ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Philosophers trained in the socio-cultural philosophical systems reflect upon the relations between humanity and the environment. The development of practical philosophical systems based on the thinking of René Descartes and, the use of philosophical principles of understanding introduced by Francis Bacon, furthered modern science's dominant position in the environmental system. The French materialistic thinkers, when analyzing the relationship between humanity and the environment, often based their thinking on the anthropological and ontological ideas of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). Their contributions introduced into philosophical thought various forms of the idea that an abiding universal divinity accompanies humanity within the environment.

The attempt at integrating scientific knowledge and art forms in order to satisfy the individual's social and spiritual needs pre-dates contemporary philosophy. Today, integrating modern scientific knowledge and art forms in order to satisfy the individual's social and spiritual needs continues within an ecological philosophy. Ecological

philosophy, enriched by a dialectical approach, discloses the vertical and horizontal perspectives of the structure of knowledge. This dialectical approach makes it possible to make a conscious and critical valuation of the environment in a manner appropriate to any given culture. Through a coaxial consciousness of a vertical and a horizontal perspective, humans may engage in a global programme to create integrating principles within modern cultures and their environment.

Historically, by the 1980's a reciprocal relationship between ecology and culture was becoming more and more understood and accepted by philosophers. Through an awareness of their reciprocal relationship, humans have come to understand the totality of spiritual and social values constituting their environment. Through a holistic understanding of the environment, that is an understanding that an entity is greater and other than the sum of its individual parts, environmental systems act as complex sets of socio-cultural processes being greater than their individual processes.

### 1.11 SUMMARY

Modern (and postmodern) experience confirms that a re-evaluation of philosophical and scientific methodologies is needed. The point of a philosophical re-evaluation of ecological problems is that philosophers not impose their individual value systems upon the environment. A re-evaluated philosophical approach to ecology increasingly reflects a synthesis, or integration, of the previously separated areas of modern scientific knowledge and social practice. A profound evolutionary development may be distinguished between an ecological philosophy that helps theoretical philosophers comprehend the environment and an ecological philosophy that helps practical philosophers transform the environment.

Ecological philosophers ponder the conditions of existence of living organisms and the mutual relations between organisms and the world they inhabit. Ecological philosophers take the stance that no single interpretation of reality can compel a rational consensus of all minds, and that philosophy cannot convincingly support a single value system. From an ecological philosophical perspective, philosophers help humanity organize itself not only as social creature but also as intellectual one. An ecological

philosophy, in contact with reality, must look objectively to the cosmos. We do need to experience ourselves somewhat subjectively as artisans within modern techno-digital world in an all-embracing activity that develops our human capabilities.

Theologians have need of the phenomenological methodology. A phenomenological methodology discloses the central notion of co-creation within the environment. Ecological phenomenological philosophy, as a methodology, discloses the integration of life sustaining values within the human consciousness. Ecological philosophers find it necessary both to understand life itself and to conceive an anthropology that re-constructs the modern subject in terms essentially different from those of the Middle Ages. Given contemporary consciousness, an understanding of depth and mystery, of drama and pathos, of spirituality, of the whole experience of life, of the world and of God, will be at variance with the Middle Ages.

Philosophers realize that the principles of an ecological phenomenological understanding of the environment depend on social conditions that satisfy both the spiritual and temporal needs of the individual. The global character of ecological difficulties calls for an intentional re-evaluation of philosophical perspectives on an international scale. The intellectual enterprise revolves around how humans relate to experiential facts and subsequently design an appropriate philosophical interpretation.

A relational unity of the human subject with the physical environment is the most important principle of a phenomenological ecological philosophy. In other words, through this dialectical relationship humanity conceives itself to be at home in the universe and, as co-creating constituents in the cosmos.



## CHAPTER TWO

### PHENOMENOLOGICAL ECO-PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS

#### 2.1 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ECO-PHILOSOPHICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

One intended purpose of an ecological philosophy, or eco-philosophy, as I speak of it in this chapter, is to construct methods of thinking that will assist us in our understanding of the activity of life in the world. That is to say that an eco-philosophy attends to the transcendental, the spiritual, as well as to the material aspects of our environment. In the West, the scholastic philosophical method, or some variation of it, has been used to evaluate transcendental or spiritual experience. In modern times, however, other interpretive options have become available, such as phenomenological philosophy. Scholastic philosophy is no longer the sole supporter of theology in the interpretation of the universe. The modern sciences have become partners in the interpretive dialogue with theology and their particular methods have had to be considered in the interpretation of the environment.

A phenomenological eco-philosophical approach is increasingly preferred by many philosophers in interpreting their experiences. A phenomenological interpretation is qualitatively different from the scholastic method of interpretation in that a phenomenological interpretation discloses notions of a personal subjective consciousness in contrast to objective and external ideals. A phenomenological philosophy does not disclose an idealistic theoretical pre-understanding. When supported by scholastic philosophy, theologians are required to conceptualize their mental objects

as epistemological ideals susceptible to a pre-understanding. But when supported by a phenomenological eco-philosophy, on the other hand, theologians are required to inquire into the subjective meaning of religious experience in the world. Such inquiry into subjective meaning is not limited to the physical description of religious experience, but includes that which is transcendent and spiritual in experience. Phenomenological disclosure is relative to the interpretive agent and, thus, not bound to the objective intellectual constructs of any single culture but is characterized by the cultural context of the agent. The interpretation of theological modernism, as an identifiable Western intellectual construct, has provided a threshold for phenomenological philosophical interpretation in lieu of the scholastic formulations. In their respective approaches, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) sought ways of philosophical understanding that would be more authentic in giving meaning to human experience than traditional Western metaphysics. In the theological inquiry that follows, I follow a phenomenological eco-philosophical understanding that engages the subject's immediate, total and holistic perception of the environment.

## 2.2 AN ECO-PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Phenomenological eco-philosophical theologians concern themselves with the notion of becoming, an evolutionary term, more than with the idea of being, a scholastic term, in the interpretation of religious experience. However, their inquiry into being and becoming is not a philosophical metaphysics of the type that has been elsewhere described as the "Queen of the Sciences."<sup>58</sup> Rather, the intention of phenomenological theological inquiry, according to Laycock, is to reach "God without God," a phrase coined by Husserl.<sup>59</sup>

Phenomenological theological inquiry interprets a present human experience in a manner similar to the way in which poets and artists interpret experience. The style of

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<sup>58</sup> Etienne Gilson, "On Behalf of the Handmaid," in *Renewal of Religious Thought*, ed. L. K. Shook (Montreal: Palm), 1968.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen William Laycock, "Introduction: Toward an Overview of Phenomenological Theology," in *Essays in Phenomenological Theology*, ed. Stephen William Laycock and James G. Hart (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), 1-22.

theological interpretation adopted by the phenomenological method of disclosure reflects an existential, not an idealistic, consciousness of life. Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was among the first to initiate this style of inquiry into life's experiences. Other philosophers have had similar thoughts. J. G. Fichte, W. J. Schelling, Martin Heidegger, G. W. F. Hegel, L. Feuerbach, K. Marx, and F. Nietzsche also adopted an existential approach in their philosophical inquiries.

The scholastic method of philosophy was common to both Roman Catholic and Anglican theology. D. Liderbach tells us that Modernists insisted upon the importance of phenomena as the starting point to describe and interpret the givenness of experience.<sup>60</sup> Although not phenomenological philosophers, George Tyrrell (1861-1909) and Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) are significant representatives of Modernist theological thinking and their work consisted of an existential evaluation of the expressions of religious understanding appropriate to their day. Within the Anglican tradition, the Modernist theologians were known as "modern churchmen" and the most influential among them were H. D. A. Major and W. R. Inge. Cyril Garbett has noted that large numbers of the churchmen of the day regarded the claims of Christianity as inconsistent with modern ways of thought. Phrases like *the Fatherhood of God*, *Salvation through Christ*, and *Life after Death* seemed to them to have been meaningless platitudes.<sup>61</sup> Thus, new theological understandings based on a new philosophy need to be constructed to prepare the way for the future of religious belief. In the future, and for some of us today, religious belief must take on the new form of an existential phenomenological eco-philosophy such as characterized by L. Dewart's notion of de-Hellenization.<sup>62</sup>

In scholastic thinking, theoretical questions and answers are formulated and governed by a Hellenized and fixed idea of nature and being. Theological de-Hellenization reflects a phenomenological consciousness of experience that has replaced the scholastic understanding of experience. As such, de-Hellenization presents a new threshold of activity in theological interpretation. Unfortunately, philosophical de-Hellenization has been discounted and subsequently abandoned by many thinkers within

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<sup>60</sup> Daniel Liderbach "Modernism in the Roman Church" *Explorations: Journal for Adventurous Thought* 20 (2001:17-36).

<sup>61</sup> Cyril Garbett *The Claims of the Church of England* Hodder and Stoughton 1947.

<sup>62</sup> Armand Maurer, "Dewart's De-Hellenization of Belief in God," *The Ecumenist* 5 (1967:22-25).

Western philosophy. As a result, many of them have missed the opportunity to encounter a new threshold of theological inquiry initiated by the Modernist movement.

The various schools of philosophical thought are culturally and historically identifiable. That is, schools of philosophical thought have evolved. They are a product of their times and environment. Terms change to reflect a new consciousness within the historical development in philosophy. By way of example, in phenomenological thought, *existence*, which is a classical idea, is re-conceived in terms of *becoming*. And *union*, a classical idea, is re-conceived as *unity*, a relational notion, just as *necessity*, a classical idea, is replaced by the phenomenological notion of *freedom*.

Theologians continually search for new and meaningful ways to understand religious experience. No hidden or ideal meanings are disclosed in phenomenological theological language which assists in the interpretation of experience. Notions come into form only in light of the subject's mindful intent. J. Morreall concludes that appealing to hidden meaning in theological language is a negative undertaking since no hidden meanings exist. Human words are based on intentions formed in the mind and if theological language is possible then theological intentions must also be possible. We should not spend our time trying to appeal to hidden meanings that do not exist in theological language.<sup>63</sup> Rather than attempt to identify hidden meanings, phenomenological theological thinking assigns religious meaning to phenomena. Phenomenological theology is thus freed from all allegorical limitations of human language. That the phenomenological method presents new thresholds for theological inquiry can be demonstrated by philosophers and theologians, but whether phenomenologists of religion have accurately grasped what is demanded by these methods is doubtful.<sup>64</sup>

Within contemporary philosophical thinking in the West, a renaissance is in the making as phenomenological disclosure reveals new thresholds of consciousness within Western culture. T. Ryba notes that many observers, both inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church, make the inference that the church's theology may be on the verge of

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<sup>63</sup> John Morreall "Can Theological Language Have Hidden Meaning?" *Religious Studies* 19 (1983:43-56)

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Ryba *The Essence of Phenomenology and its Meaning for the Scientific Study of Religion* Peter Lang 1991.

another grand synthesis that might supplant Thomism.<sup>65</sup> This grand synthesis would be contingent upon the abandonment of traditional theoretical thinking, according to A. T. Tymieniecka.<sup>66</sup> A way forward for contemporary religious philosophy in interpreting environmental issues, I suggest, is through a phenomenological understanding of eco-philosophical activity. In what follows I present three phenomenological thresholds for eco-philosophical reflection.

### 2.3 AN ECO-PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION: SCHOLASTIC APPREHENSION SHIFTS TO PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

According to L. Gilkey,<sup>67</sup> in Western theological understanding, debate has moved from the question of the structure of religious language (an issue of scholastic apprehension) to the more radical question of a mode of meaningful discourse (an issue of phenomenological interpretation) in which the interpreter is part of the experience. Scholastic theological understanding does not falsify the interpretive task. Rather, scholastic understanding is inadequate for the contemporary interpretive task. Phenomenological theologians continue to look to new disclosures to replace scholastic ideology. Theological interpretation is undergoing an *aggiornamento*, an up-dating, or better, a *ressourcement*, a return to the sources, and becoming disengaged from a culture that no longer exists as it encounters new thresholds for interpretation. The environment to be interpreted is changing. A co-responsible and co-creative relationship is disclosed in a phenomenological consciousness of this environment. This is significant because humanity may now present itself as co-responsible and co-creative agents with divine life. In a scholastic ideology, this understanding of co-creatorship is not tenable. M. Merleau-Ponty offers a criticism of the scholastic ideology in that Catholic critics wish for things to reveal a God-directed orientation of the world and wish for humanity, like things, to be nothing but a nature heading toward its perfection.<sup>68</sup>

In theology, no hermeneutic, no clear method, no set of rules secures certainty of

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<sup>65</sup> Ryba, op. cit. (1991:ix) *The Essence of Phenomenology*.

<sup>66</sup> Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *Phenomenology and Science in Contemporary European Thought* Noonday 1962.

<sup>67</sup> Langdon Gilkey *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* Bobbs-Merrill 1969.

<sup>68</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty *Sense and Non-Sense* Northwestern University Press 1964.

interpretation and understanding of religious experience. However, a relational approach suggests participatory activity within phenomenological philosophical interpretation. This participatory activity is the difference between scholastic apprehension and phenomenological interpretation. In phenomenological understanding, the Christian interprets his or her life-world through a *theologia crucis* of religious experience. The *theologia crucis* interpretation is an existential threshold for phenomenological experience. For most Western Christians, modernity, or postmodernity, is the context of the *theologia crucis*, and neither can, nor will, any longer borrow the criteria for interpretation from models supplied by another epoch. It creates normativity out of itself.<sup>69</sup> According to G. Kaufman, in the phenomenological existential interpretation of the *theologia crucis*, theology becomes fundamentally an activity of construction and reconstruction, not one of theoretical ideology or exposition, as it has ordinarily been understood in scholastic theology.<sup>70</sup>

#### 2.4 AN ECO-PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION: DICHOTOMOUS KNOWLEDGE SHIFTS TO UNITARY KNOWLEDGE

Another threshold of interpretation is the philosophical shift in thinking from a scholastic to a phenomenological form of knowledge. F. Sontag suggests that when philosophy regains its proper role, that is, asking questions that no science can determine for it, it becomes less certain, but also more flexible so that theology can once again utilize its support.<sup>71</sup> In the shift from static, scholastic knowledge to active, participatory knowledge certain terms are not to be confused. Subjectivism and objectivism are terms that denote specific doctrines or systems of knowledge, whereas subjectivity and objectivity are terms that connote a phenomenological and relational interpretation of the life-world or environment. In Western ideology, characteristics modeled after anthropomorphic concepts are predicated of that which is divine. Further, when applied to deity, these predicates are often interpreted as real and as constituting deity *in se*. That divinity is believed to exist or to be Other, or is understood as Other, does not reveal

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<sup>69</sup> Jürgen Habermas *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* MIT Press 1992.

<sup>70</sup> Gordon Kaufman *An Essay on Theological Method* Scholars Press 1990.

<sup>71</sup> Frederick Sontag *The Future of Theology: A Philosophical Basis for Contemporary Protestant Thought* Westminster Press 1969.

anything of the divine constitution or whether God, or gods, exist. In contrast to classical ideology, phenomenological interpretation does not present a particular, yet common, or separate but universal, objective external reality. Scholastic philosophy/ideology posits that a true, absolute being, one who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and transcendent, personally exists over and above the temporal world, imparting knowledge to the knower. As a result, in scholastic philosophy such absolute being lacks the potential for any development or evolution. This contrasts with phenomenological philosophy in which an evolutionary understanding of relative *becoming*, as opposed to absolute *being*, is disclosed and relationships are socially intended and constructed rather than imposed and determined through external theoretical categories.

A relational knowledge is a knowledge that discloses a phenomenological existential interpretation of those social and cultural symbols that have not lost their power to convince us, according to Paul Tillich.<sup>72</sup> Since phenomenological interpretation is socially constructed, Kaufman notes that we must see human existence in terms of these symbolical constructions that form a phenomenological unity, not dichotomous union.<sup>73</sup>

## 2.5 AN ECO-PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION: IDEALISTIC LANGUAGE SHIFTS TO PARTICIPATORY LANGUAGE

I follow W. F. Zuurdeeg's interpretation that theological language is convictional language of a special type.<sup>74</sup> However, for C. Botha,<sup>75</sup> theological language is not necessarily confessional language. I suggest that theological convictional language is unique due to its participatory, not merely descriptive, character. Further, theological language defies conventional semantics, according to Raschke, and is self-consciously revelatory.<sup>76</sup> In identifying the field of participatory language, Hans Küng tells us that it

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<sup>72</sup> Paul Tillich *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue* (ed. D. Mackenzie Brown) Harper and Row 1965.

<sup>73</sup> Kaufman op. cit. (1990:38) *Essay on Theological Method*

<sup>74</sup> Willem Frederick Zuurdeeg "The Nature of Theological Language" *Journal of Religion* 40 (1960) pp. 1-8.

<sup>75</sup> Chris Botha *The Cave of Adullam or Achor, a Door of Hope? A History of the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Africa* University of South Africa Press 1990.

<sup>76</sup> Carl Raschke *The Alchemy of the Word: Language and the End of Theology* Scholars Press 1979.



includes daily common, human and ambiguous experiences.<sup>77</sup> Further, Gregory Baum observes that many Christians desire to speak about reality in continuity with ordinary experiences of their lives.<sup>78</sup> All this presents an opportunity for humans to encounter in their daily lives new thresholds for theological interpretation from an eco-philosophical and phenomenological perspective, not a classical idealistic one. C. E. Winqvist suggests that interpreting existence through the word of God shifts our idealistic language to a participatory language.<sup>79</sup> L. Dewart suggests that the Berkeleian view *esse est percipi* (being is perception) may be rendered *esse est referri* (being is relational) within our contemporary threshold of experience.<sup>80</sup> *Esse est referri*, as participatory (phenomenological) language, is preferred to *esse est percipi*, which is idealistic (classical) language.

## 2.6 SUMMARY

Scholastic philosophy is no longer the primary supporter of theology in the interpretation of the cosmos. A phenomenological eco-philosophical language is preferred by many to interpret their experiences. A phenomenological eco-philosophical inquiry addresses the notion of *becoming* in the interpretation of experience. Theological de-Hellenization reflects an interpretation of experience through a phenomenological consciousness that has replaced the scholastic method of interpretation. As such, de-Hellenization presents a new threshold of activity in theological interpretation. Unfortunately, the activity of de-Hellenization has been discounted and subsequently abandoned by many thinkers within Western philosophy. As a result, much of humanity has missed the opportunity to encounter a new threshold of theological inquiry. Scholastic theological understanding does not falsify the interpretive task. Rather, scholastic understanding is inadequate for the contemporary interpretive task. Phenomenological theologians continue to look to new understandings to replace

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<sup>77</sup> Hans Küng *Theology for the Third Millenium: An Ecumenical View* Doubleday 1988.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory Baum *Man Becoming: God in Secular Language* Herder and Herder 1967.

<sup>79</sup> Charles E Winqvist *The Communion of Possibility* New Horizons 1975.

<sup>80</sup> Leslie Dewart *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* University of Toronto Press 1989.



scholastic ideology. Many Western-educated individuals understand themselves as faithful, co-responsible agents and seek new thresholds for theological inquiry that will express their participatory role in the religious interpretation of the life-world. In theology, no hermeneutic, no clear method, no set of rules secures a certainty of apprehension and understanding of religious experience. However, a relational approach suggests the assurance of participatory consciousness within phenomenological philosophical understanding.

Scholastic philosophy/ideology posits that a true, absolute being, one who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and transcendent, personally exists over and above the temporal world, imparting knowledge to the knower. Thus, in scholastic philosophy, absolute being lacks the potential for any development or evolution. This contrasts with phenomenological philosophy, in which an evolutionary understanding of *becoming*, as opposed to absolute *being*, is disclosed and relationships are consciously intended and constructed rather than determined by external theoretical categories.

ABOUT the AUTHOR



EXAMINERS' REPORT:  
Reference: ASOI/07/2010  
Student: Allan Maurice Savage

Date: 1 July 2010  
Degree: Doctor of Letters

The candidate presented a portfolio of publications for assessment accompanied by a critical commentary in line for the regulations for the degree entitled “Interdisciplinary Insights Applied within a Theological Context”. The portfolio was extremely wide-ranging and included work principally in the area of theology and secondarily in the areas of philosophy and psychology.

*[The list of previously granted credentials at degree level has been omitted.]*

In addition to previous degree awards and ministerial appointments, the portfolio contained two testimonials from the Bishop of Algoma attesting to his appreciation and high regard for the candidate’s work in ministry.

*[The list of publications books, booklets and articles for evaluation has been omitted.]*

The evidence of achievement in line with the Regulations for the granting of the degree of Doctor of Letters by published work was amply displayed. The high level and scope of the work undertaken was clearly evidenced and offered a contribution to scholarship that was both original and unusually broadly-based. It was clear that the candidate had thoroughly absorbed the corpus of existing thought in his chosen areas, and had shown himself to be both a cogent expositor of the scholarship of others and an original thinker in his own right.

The candidate supplied a detailed exegesis in his critical commentary that considered each submitted work in turn. The examiners greatly appreciated the role of this approach in clarifying the intentions, methodology and context of the works concerned. The candidate also included a list of the libraries which have acquired at least one of his books. He concludes that “their acceptance tells me they determined that my books ‘have something to say’ of academic value to the university community and perhaps to the civic community at large.” The examiners endorse this conclusion and commend the work involved accordingly.

REFLECTIONS ON ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY  
in Light of Dehellenized Western Theism

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It is invidious and necessarily subjective to single out examples of particular work in a submission that was uniformly impressive, but the three books “A Phenomenological Understanding of Certain Liturgical Texts: The Anglican Collects for Advent and the Roman Catholic Collects for Lent”, “Faith, Hope and Charity as Character Traits in Adler’s Individual Psychology with Related Essays in Spirituality and Phenomenology” and “The Ecology: A ‘New to You’ View (An Orthodox Theological Ecology)” were held by the examiners to be of particular merit.

The examiners felt in summary that the submission was of an exemplary quality and reflected exceptional achievement over a sustained period of time. The award of a higher doctorate does not permit the conferral of marks of distinction, but in this case it was felt that the submission was such as to have merited this accolade were it to have been available.

Andrew Linley, D.D. (Convenor)  
Vice-President and Director of Administrative Affairs  
Percy Dearmer Professor of Liturgical Studies

John Kersey, Hon.LL.D., Hon.D.Mus., D.D., Ed.D., Ph.D.  
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OTHER (Self-published) BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

- 2009 The Ecology: A “New to You View”: An Orthodox Theological Ecology
- 2009 Dehellenization and Dr. Dewart Revisited: A First Person Philosophical Reflection
- 2012 The “Avant-grade” Theology of George Tyrell: Its Philosophical Roots Changed my Theological Thinking
- 2013 Philosophical memoirs: Constructing Christian Theology in The Contemporary World
- 2017 A Future for Disbelief: Philosophy in a Dehellenized Age with Implications for Theology
- 2018 Faith and Queer Consciousness: Philosophical Thinking in a New Key
- 2019 On Posthuman Theism: “God Consciousness” and Leslie Dewart (1922-2009)